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PLAYBILL



JANE HU
One rarely encounters an artist as comfortable shifting between the rational and creative realms as Hu—a renowned Burning Man photographer and a Stanford MBA. That capacity for complexity is why we asked her to spend a weekend snapping the outré arts community that's transforming a tiny town in the California desert (Wasteland Wonderland). "I'm obsessed with the potential of art to effect change; the Bombay Beach Biennale is literally the aesthetic manifestation of that."

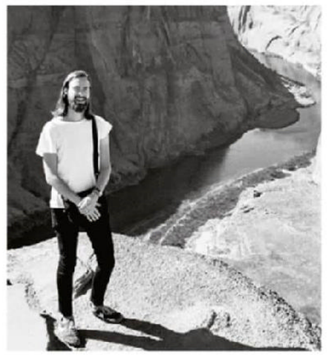


ALEX THOMAS
For The Long Road to President Pete, we sent our Washington correspondent out on the campaign trail with South Bend, Indiana mayor Pete Buttigieg, the fresh-faced contender who could take down Trump — and, if elected, become the country's first openly gay president. "America is ready for somebody who doesn't fit the profile of a typical president," Thomas says. "Mayor Pete has been able to capitalize on that."

WILL VARNER
Varner's mash-up of KonMari and clitorises marks a break from PLAYBOY's historically hetero humor. " I try to tell stories that reflect the complex, diverse, troubling but beautiful world we live in," says the former BuzzFeed design director. "I hope this one makes readers laugh and also increases the spaces where queer people can feel comfortable and see their stories represented." Varner is also an illustrator and an adjunct professor at the School of Visual Arts.



GRAHAM DUNN
Citing nature and nostalgia as themes that inform his work, Dunn is known for his ability to capture strikingly intimate moments. We tapped the longtime PLAYBOY contributor to photograph Tyler Blackburn on the precipice of a new chapter in the actor's life. "Tyler did this cool switching between contemplative moments and direct glimpses of himself," says Dunn of the shoot for Down to Earth. "It made for a really personal portrait session."





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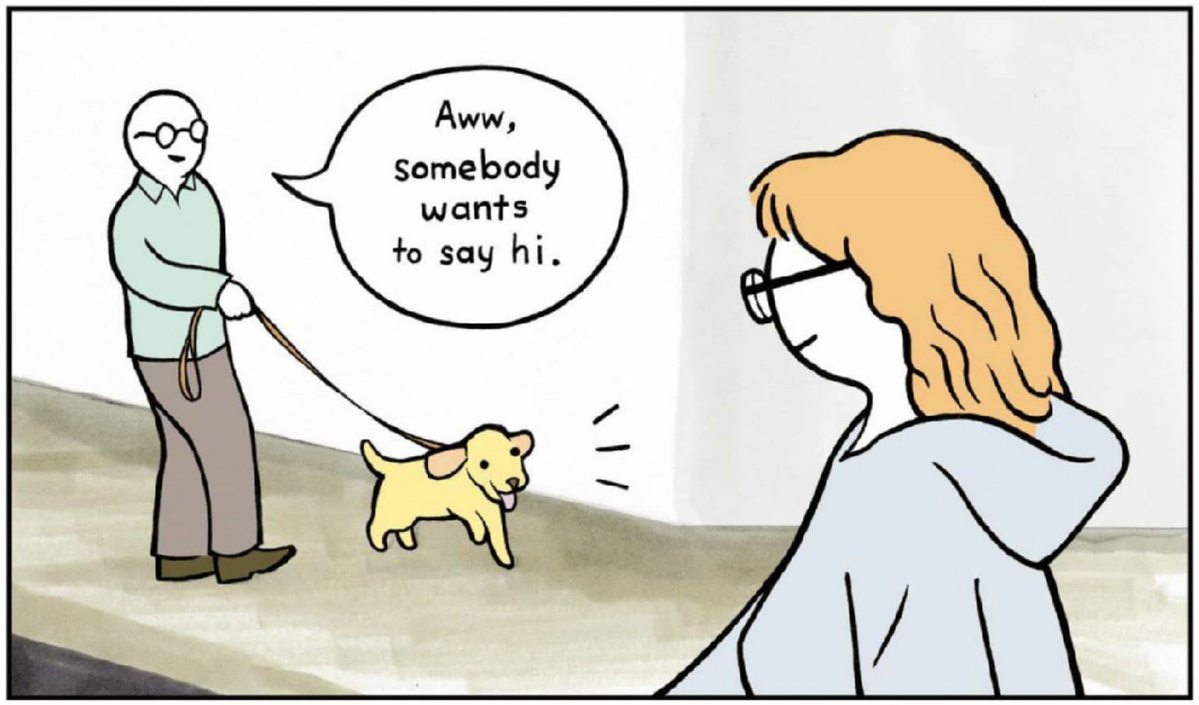
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Andrea Abeli
Photography by Jonathan Castellanos

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CHIDERA EGGERUE

A body-positivity blogger propelled into fame, the woman behind The Slumflower reflects on the freedom—and scrutiny—that comes with leading a feminist movement

BY **GRACE SHUTTI**

"There's so much value in being a troublemaker!" says Chidera Eggerue — though in relative terms, stirring things up is a fairly recent development for the 24-year-old. It started with her fashion blog, The Slumflower, a hub for stylish black women who don't relate to the trend of "mostly white women with the same balayage hairstyle, fedora hat and camel coat." This led to her creation of the SaggyBoobsMatter hashtag in the fall of 2017, which launched her into the body-positivity movement. The irony is that Eggerue, long made to feel self-conscious about her appearance, once saved money for a breast augmentation. Then she had an epiphany: Celebrating her body and defying the culture's obsession with perky breasts might flip the conversation for women — at the very least, for some women of color.

Calling her work within this 21st century movement a success would be an understatement. Touted as a leading feminist voice of her generation, Eggerue has appeared on national talk shows in the United Kingdom to discuss her social savvy (more than 12,000 Instagram posts bear the SaggyBoobsMatter hashtag); published a best-selling book, 2018's *What a Time to Be Alone*; hosted her first #BlockHimParty (in which she encourages women to leave toxic relationships); and fronted an Adidas campaign that was plastered across London's Underground.

Eggerue assures me she didn't come out of the womb like this. Raised by Nigerian parents in Peckham — home to the largest community of Nigerians in the U.K. — she was an inquisitive child who wanted to be "liked and accepted." She tried to "blend into the background" until the BRIT School put her on a new path. The performing arts institution that has produced such singular talents as Adele, Amy Winehouse and Imogen Heap encouraged individualism, leading Eggerue to develop a mantra: "I can be different, I can stand out, I can be loud, I can be annoying, and I'm not gonna be punished for this," she tells me.

She brings the same moxie to our discussions about how racism robs black girls of their innocence and why she's happy Serena Williams finally found the love she deserves. Each point is delivered with blazing conviction. Manicured nails waving, she's animated enough to remind you she's a young black woman from south London (one energized "*Okkkkk*" here, a "Girl, sometimes it be like that" there) but slick enough to repeat my questions in her answers — a tell indicating someone who has done a lot of interviews.

Her radical outspokenness, mixed with just the right amount of self-awareness, is one reason 220,000 people follow her on Instagram. She throws punches at the patriarchy in her captions, making them accessible to people who may not have read Audre Lorde. She also posts selfies in her underwear, though she jokingly tells me "the tiddies are still exclusive" after deciding to wear lingerie for her PLAYBOY shoot. More seriously, she remains conscious of her extended family. "What will my relatives in Nigeria think if they see my naked breast?" she says, breaking into a Nigerian accent. "I'm not ready to start doing that yet."

Proverbs in Igbo, Eggerue's first language, are the backbone of *What a Time to Be Alone*. The first adage in the book warns against comparing yourself to others: "He who is asking for the same haircut as John, does he have the same shaped head as John?" Eggerue credits such wisdom with saving her life. And while many fans would say she's taught them self-love, just as many cite her "tough truths." Dating advice is also her purview, and lesson one is on maximizing your standards through strategic courtship.

Eggerue tells women to be "as specific as you want to be," regardless of whether it limits a potential suitor's height, skin tone or occupation. "If there are women in the world who love dating tall men," she says, "why can't there be others who say, 'I love dating rich men'?"

Some have pushed back at Eggerue for encouraging women to engage in transactional relationships. If you consider how stereotypes like that of the gold digger commonly stigmatize black women, it's easy to understand the flak. "They have this idea that the exchange reflects your value as a human being," she says of the critics. "I don't believe that's the case. It just means you chose to negotiate that. And that's fine. Black women, out of everyone, deserve to struggle the least. We deserve a love that allows us to feel free. Love hits differently when you don't have to worry about paying the rent."



When I suggest the average woman may not have the same leverage as an author-speaker-infuencer, Eggerue concedes the point. “That’s absolutely true,” she says, “but I still believe you can negotiate relatively, even if your negotiation is ‘I want a free meal.’ ” She adds a disclaimer: “My personal negotiation does not have to reflect femininity as a whole or feminism as a movement.”

Even with all the advice she dispenses, surely dating as the Slumflower can’t be easy. “It does interfere heavily,” she admits. “It means I can’t really date across anymore.” She instead dates high- earning men who don’t “feel compelled to want to compete with me, because they have so much going for themselves.” When I ask if she has found men who meet those standards, her answer is unequivocal: “Absolutely, absolutely.”

She says the approach has also changed her sex life. “I used to believe that my value came from being attractive enough for men to want to have sex with me.” Once she became more confident, the landscape changed. “I don’t engage in casual sex, because sex is such an important and powerful tool I can use to get what I want.”

I give her a quizzical look.

“I’m dead serious,” she says. “If a man can fix his mouth to ask me for sex, I can fix my mouth to ask him what I want to ask him for. That’s not to say women who choose to engage in casual sex aren’t lining up the best of their potential. It’s saying there’s power in this, and you can harness it if you want to.”

Redefining the power dynamic between the sexes doesn’t come without a learning curve, however. A few weeks before our interview, Eggerue came under fire for since-deleted tweets that some claim made light of male suicide rates. She posted an essay to clarify her views, stating that though the harm men suffer as a consequence of toxic masculinity is a valid concern, “men often bring up their victimhood to patriarchy as a means to silence women.”

Her comments triggered a debate about her brand of feminism. When I ask if she understands the backlash, Eggerue restates her mission to “highlight female oppression.” She adds that men have the ability to organize: “If women were able to congregate and create things like feminism, I believe men have even more power to do something for themselves where they can build, create and support initiatives to help themselves.”

Still, many of her critics are put off by the idea that modern feminism means being comfortable with — or even celebrating — men experiencing harm. Some wonder how that benefits feminism, or indeed humanity. Prominent black women have expressed their disagreement with Eggerue but have also called out the impropriety of those who’ve leveled criticism against a black woman who is only 24. Author Reni Eddo-Lodge, for example, remarked that The Guardian’s Zoe Williams, who wrote an op-ed piece titled “Feminism Without Human Warmth Leaves Me Cold,” didn’t show “the same energy for her white feminist peers who’ve been challenged on their intersectional failures.”

“These publications exist in a place of comfort where they can afford to chuck a black woman in the firing line and watch people scrap for the bones,” Eggerue says. “Then you have super rightwing white men in your notifications telling you you deserve to die. It’s like, how did we get here?”

Spending time offline is a no-brainer, and it’s telling that Eggerue is building a career beyond the clutches of the internet. Her excitement is palpable when she discusses working with women in Nigeria. She wants to learn from older women who have done similar work but is wary of forcing her British experience on people. “The social landscape is different. I don’t wanna just go there and be like, ‘Hey, everyone, I’m here now.’ I want a calculated approach. But,” she adds, “I also can’t afford to wait for people to like what I’m doing in order for my future to materialize.”

You may not agree with her, but it’s naive to discount the impact Eggerue has had on other women — the ones she has inspired but also the ones who disagree with her. And that is a reality she’s more than fine with: “I will have to live with all of my decisions. Nobody else.” ■

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THE IDENTITY

It has been 71 years since Alfred Kinsey broke ground in the study of human sexuality by introducing the Kinsey scale, which served as the first prominent claim that sexual orientation is nonbinary. Suggesting one’s orientation can fall anywhere between exclusively heterosexual and exclusively homosexual, Kinsey’s theory remains relevant as similar assertions on gender fluidity and expression emerge, changing how we think about sexual identity. Below, we define a few identity markers and plot some key public figures based on sex, gender expression and sexual orientation to demonstrate the possibilities, whether you’re cisgender, transgender, nonbinary or non-identifying. Enjoy, and remember: Only you can determine your sexual identity.

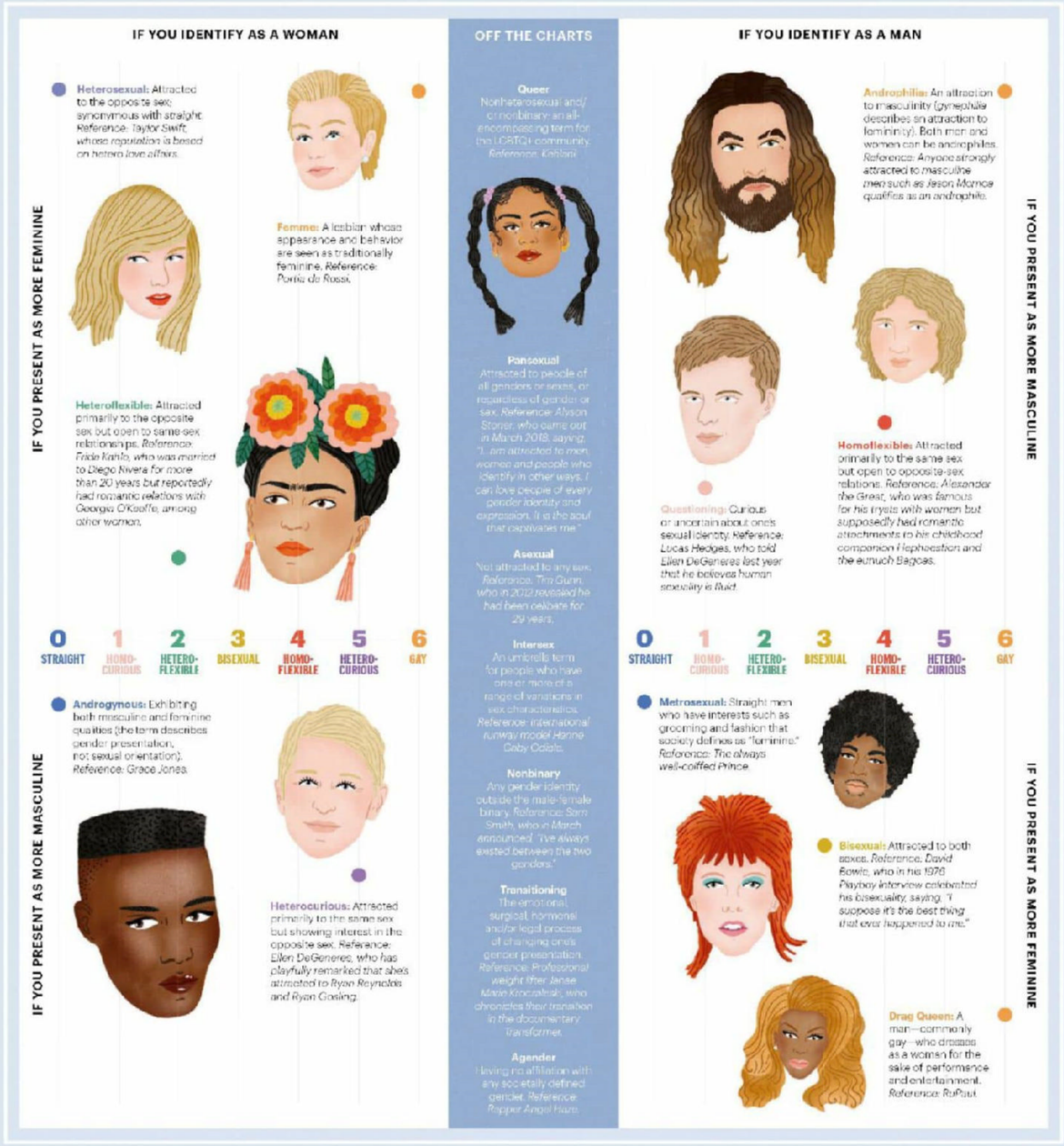


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MATRIX



ILLUSTRATION BY **KATIE BAILIE**

PLAYBOY
ADVISOR

We're thrilled to present this issue's special guest Advisor: world-renowned therapist and author **Esther Perel.** Read on as she tackles your questions about fantasies, fidelity, foreplay and much more

Q: *I'm a woman in my early 20s, in a relationship with a man in his mid-40s. I'm not concerned about the age difference, but the financial difference is dramatic. I live paycheck to paycheck; he makes seven figures a year. Whenever he takes me out, I can't afford to go 50-50. As a feminist, I feel infantilized having an older man pay for everything. How can I feel like I'm contributing equally?*

A: Contribution is about value; it's not only about dollars. You may not be able to afford a fancy meal, but you can invite him over and cook, no matter how small your space, or you can say, "There's a nice taco truck down the street." Evenings like those can be just as exotic and fun as dinner at a Michelin-starred restaurant. It's about the gesture with which you say, "I too can contribute to our relationship. I love to give you things, even if it's not half the check."

Egalitarianism isn't always symmetry; complementarity and fairness are the goals here. So whatever you do, don't let the discrepancy between your bank accounts keep you from taking any initiative because you think that what you have to offer isn't equal in amount. It's equal in meaning. (For his part, don't forget that he knows who he picked.)

You mention you're a feminist. What I make of that is that somebody may have told you that an older man shouldn't be paying your way. That's a ready-made idea. Why can't a feminist be taken care of by a man—or a woman, for that matter? It doesn't mean you don't have your own means. And you're in your early 20s; this is a developmental situation translated into an ideological one. (When you're 46 we'll discuss it again.) I wish for you to find myriad ways to express your identity, your feminist ideas and your feelings for this man.

Q: *What advice would you give to straight men who want to be better in bed?*

A: Good sex is far less about mechanics and performance and far more about erotic intelligence. That's why the number one thing is this: *Slow down.* Don't go instantly looking for the spot — the genitals, the butt, the clit. Know that foreplay is not five minutes before the "real thing"—penetration, orgasm (often only yours) and then sleep. For many women, the real thing includes everything before and after, and what's between her ears matters as much as what's between her legs. Understand the erotic power of words and that when the lips around the mouth open, so will those other lips you're so interested in. (Know also that a great kisser is irresistible.)

This might surprise you, but don't go specifically chasing her orgasm. Your ability as a lover is not measured by her ability to peak. Erotic highs are as much about pleasure and excitement as they are about coming — and nothing is more of an orgasm killer than pressure. She'll fake it just to cut the pressure short, and you will never know. So focus on pleasing her. What she enjoys is your attention on her, your desire for her, your lavishing and ravishing her and making her feel irresistible. It's in these moments that women feel they can let go and enjoy themselves.

Here is something else I want you to know: Desire isn't just this spontaneous thing that sweeps over you in an irresistible wave. There are many ways for women to engage in sex. Sometimes she's aroused, other times she has desire but isn't yet turned on, and then there are the times when she's willing, not because she's hot or in the mood but simply because she's open to see what will happen. For women, sexual desire can be responsive like that. And sometimes they anticipate pressure from you even when it's not there, so if they touch you and you get turned on, they worry they'll have to go all the way — before they've decided if they want to. If they could do some simmering, kissing, stroking, turning on and then leaving, staying turned on and falling asleep in a state of arousal, they would love it. And if you really want to be a better lover, keep that in mind.

Q: *It's hard for me to witness my partner's many fantasies about other people. What am I supposed to make of this?*

A: There are really two questions here: one about the nature of fantasy and another about what your partner's fantasies mean to you and *about* you. These have very different answers.

To address the first question: If you really want to know what people are longing for in sex, look at their fantasies. Fantasies express some of our deepest emotional needs in the language of sex. But they're not simple; they're like dreams that have to be decoded. If you can find the curiosity to engage in a conversation with your partner about his

If you really want to know what people are longing for in sex, look at their fantasies. Fantasies express some of our deepest emotional needs in the language of sex. But they're not simple; they're like dreams that have to be decoded.

fantasies, you may find yourself having one of the most fascinating chats two people can have.

And then there's the question of you and your feelings. Does it seem as if your partner is being secretive in his erotic imaginings, or does your discomfort result from a lack of confidence on your part? Some people interpret their partner's fantasies as a statement that something is lacking, but you could very well be included in the plot. And while the modern romantic ideal suggests that we should be able to fulfill all our partners' erotic needs, that's not necessarily the case. Either way, fantasies about others don't mean you're not loved or desired. Our erotic mind is a place where we often find the freedom to let our imagination roam. There can be something playful and deeply satisfying for both partners in exploring that.

So what can you do to feel more comfortable with your partner's fantasies? First, be honest with yourself: Do you ever have fantasies about anybody or anything else? Then, here's how I would broach it: You can tell him that the very thought of him imagining himself with other women makes you question the security of the relationship. Try to acknowledge your fear without turning it into an accusation that there's something wrong with what he does. Use that as a starting point to figure out what belongs to you versus what belongs to him.

From there you can ask him to describe his fantasies and how long he's been having them. Ask for an invitation to the antechamber of his erotic mind. That place of imaginings is more sacred, more sensitive than any of the orifices we penetrate. Try to stay curious, even if it scares you. One person's delight can be another's distaste — that's in the nature of our erotic blueprints.

As he tells you his stories, remember: Sexual fantasies are not necessarily literal narratives of secret intentions. I've seen many people fantasize about things they would never dare do in reality. Understanding the meaning of your partner's turn-ons is often what makes them less frightening. I could very well imagine you developing a safe space to experience the pleasure of fantasy together — in a way that would invigorate a loving relationship.

Q: *My wife wants sex more often than I do. I can't keep up. Sex has become an obligation, and when I say no over and over, I feel as though I'm failing her as a man. My whole life I've been horny, but now I don't even want to masturbate. What is going on with my sex drive, and what do I do about it?*

A: We have this notion that men should want sex anytime, anywhere, any way — that male sexuality is driven by hormones and no matter what's happening in their lives they're always up for it. Women who don't have desire don't question their identity as women, and yet men who struggle with desire often worry that they're not "real" men.

Let's debunk this myth. For all of us, sexuality is both psychological and biological.

What's going on in your life can kill your libido. If you're anxious, if you've experienced loss, if you're depressed or worried about your job — well, are you surprised you may not be so interested in sex? (Some men, but not all, do indeed turn to sex to alleviate their anxieties.) So what circumstances might be affecting your sexuality?

And what's going on in your relationship with your wife? Has she too bought into the idea that you should come ready for the job, with a penis like steel, prepared to go at it for two hours? Do you feel pressured, by your wife or your notions of manhood, to perform? Or is your challenge about getting turned on? About feeling worthy? About feeling uninspired? Your situation may not be sexual; it could be relational. For most of history, women have resorted to the power of refusal. Perhaps this is what's happening with you: "If I have to, I don't want to and you can't make me." Consider that your anxieties around sex could be less about your penis and more about power.

Q: *My partner sexts lots of other women but never sleeps with them. Is this a form of infidelity?*

A: These days you can cheat while lying right next to your partner in bed, so it's more urgent than ever that we have these conversations in which we draw the lines of our relationships: what is in, what is out, what is fantasy and what is betrayal. It's both a negotiation and a conversation that most straight couples don't have until the shit hits the fan. When there's a crisis of infidelity, suddenly couples start to talk about boundaries and transgression, privacy and secrecy — when, in fact, it should be a mandatory conversation that unfolds as a relationship develops.

So ask him, "What does sexting mean for you? What does it do for you? Do you like it or do you need it?" When you bring it up with him, pay attention to whether his reaction is respectful and empathetic or defensive. Does he label you "insecure" when it may very well be his own insecurity that keeps sending him back to his phone, hunting for ego strokes?

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Esther Perel offers more sex and relationship advice via Rekindling Desire, an online workshop, and the podcast Where Should We Begin?, the third season of which is slated to launch this summer on Apple Podcasts.

What's at stake here is this: Either his flirting will divert erotic energy away from you, leaving you hungry for the attention that he so generously gives to others, or he's a man who works up his appetite someplace else but comes home to dine on you. Figure that out and you'll get a sense of whether it's an innocent pleasure — a reassurance of his sexiness and mojo — or a more nefarious undercurrent that's destabilizing your relationship.

Q: *I want to have more sexual experiences, but I get attached after hooking up with someone, even when it's just a few times. Is there a way I can get more comfortable with one-night stands?*

A: In the past, people were embarrassed if they had sex. Today, people are embarrassed if they don't have sex. The judgment has changed, but the tyranny is still there.

Allow me to ask you: Why do you want to have more sexual experiences? Is it because you want to or because you think you should? Even more important: Is hooking up your thing? If it isn't, simply don't do it, regardless of the social pressure.

It sounds as though you feel that when you open up sexually, you also open up your heart. So what? That's actually a nice thing. Sex involves the penetration of boundaries and the exchange of fluids, to say the least; of course one feels a connection. There's nothing glamorous about trying to make sex meaningless, even if it's recreational.

That said, if you want to be more playful and uncommitted, you'll need to be able to ask your partners, "Is this just a one-night stand, or are you open to something else coming out of this?" If they're just passing by, then you make your decision. If you don't like it, don't agonize over the reason — and don't try to force yourself into something that leaves you feeling empty afterward. We often spend years trying to be who we think we should be before we finally accept who we are.

Q: *Last week I started catching up with my ex over text. We broke up more than a year ago, but there was a lack of closure, and a lot of feelings resurfaced. When my current boyfriend of six months was going down on me, I got lost in my thoughts about my ex, and right after I came, I burst into tears. My boyfriend misread it as a monumental moment of intimacy between us, and then he started tearing up because he thought it was so beautiful. I didn't have the heart to tell him the truth. Was I wrong to go along with it?*

A: No, you weren't wrong. He has nothing to do with this. If at some point you realize you're not really in love with him, then you tell him that. Meanwhile, you have a man who had a beautiful response and was moved by how vulnerable you were, and that's a good thing. I hope you can value that too.

As you may have noticed, I place a lot of emphasis on communication, but I also think wholesale sharing and all-out transparency can be insensitive. Before you tell him about your ex, ask yourself what it would be like for him to live with your confession. Given that he took your tears as a sign of intimacy and vulnerability, he would probably feel humiliated if you told him you were actually crying because you were thinking about your ex. I see no point in telling him. Decide what you want to do — talk to somebody else if you think it will help you gain clarity — but know that your new guy can't help you deal with the leftovers of your ex.

Continuing to text your ex is not going to help you either. It's a form of rumination, an unhealthy lingering, that your new boyfriend is probably not going to be able to compete with, and so it's probably wise to put a halt to it. More than your misinterpreted tears, I'm concerned about the way you've recruited your new man for a part he hasn't auditioned for. Respect both men, and yourself, by dealing with your inner conflict and unfinished business without their help. ■



ANASTASIA
L'AMOUR

Photography by **BRUCE COLERO @BRUCECOLERO**
Shoot Assistant **@DANYELLEHAWKINS**
Model **@ANNALAMOUR6**



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Describe yourself in three words.
3 words to describe myself it would be Sexy, Sassy, and Intelligent!

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
I was very ecstatic when I finally heard that I was going to pose for Playboy for the 1st time, because it's been a goal of mine since I was 18.

What was it like starting out as a model?
When I first started out as a model I was 18 working in NYC for years building my portfolio, brand, and perfecting my own personal image to make me unique from other models. I've learned that hard work, dedication, & that you need to spend money in any business to succeed.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
My biggest challenge as a model so far now is that I'm still dealing with people at times who are hypocrites & think that I don't have the intelligence/knowledge to represent myself without the help of an agent. There's still a lot of people who judge a book by its cover, meaning I dislike being misunderstood at times.

Describe your perfect day off when you are not modelling?
My perfect day off when I'm not modeling starts off by waking up at 7:00am to make myself an espresso. Then do my daily routine morning & evening shower or bath that involves a very expensive skincare routine. Then I go to meet my trainer at the gym until I go to the beauty salon & spa appt to relax and keep up with my appearance for work tomorrow. Come home cook dinner clean up then take a hot salt bath.

Do you feel more like a city person or a country person?
I'm definitely a city girl who was born & raised in the city and love the city life compared to living in the country side.

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?
If I had a choice to live anywhere in the world it would be the late Gianni Versace's home in Miami, because from a little girl I was obsessed with Versace as my favorite designer. Going there for dinner at his restaurant and experiencing what was his is heaven to me.

A guilty pleasure?
My guilty pleasure is when it comes to my physical appearance & always experimenting with the newest technology and procedures that have just got out from plastic surgeons. Fillers, spas, & shopping.

Which song is absolutely certain to make you cry whenever you hear it?
The song that makes me cry when I hear the lyrics is the song with or without you by U2.

What is your favourite word in any language and what does it mean?
I have a lot of favorite words in another language, but I only use them if I'm mad. Bella Donna "beautiful woman" in Italian just sounds very sexy to me when a man says it of course & Nostrovia cheers to your health after vodka in Russian I love.

Any last words you would like to share with the readers?
I would love to share with the readers & fans that I really truly appreciate your friendship and faith in me to help me make my goals come true. This is only the beginning of my journey & I can't wait to accomplish the many other projects I have planned for soon already to surprise my fans.

Thank you @aleksandrtitkov- showroom for my beautiful custom made jewelery and outfits. Photography@Bruce Colero Shoot-assistant@ danyellehawkins MUA@kylemakeupmckellar Tan@ tanontherun Toronto/Canada Shoes@ christianlouboutins











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WASTELAND WONDERLAND



PHOTOGRAPHY BY
JANE HU

Joséphine Wister Faure's *Levitation* speaks to the paradoxical relationship between beauty and decay that characterizes the Salton Sea and the art created there.

How three renegade curators are building an ethereal world of weirdness on the shores of a man-made lake in a scrappy pocket of the California desert

BY **ADAM SKOLNICK**

As the sun sweeps its western arc over the Salton Sea, toward the distant desert mountains, a prism appears on the cottony clouds, a rainbow rabbit hole in the sky. Just by looking up, we all drop in.

We are participants and spectators at the 2019 Bombay Beach Biennale, an underground art party that some call the new (or anti) Burning Man. (Despite the name, it has been held annually since 2016, this year over a weekend in late March.) In the next 40 hours I, along with roughly 500 invited guests, will stroll through an atheist church, watch a sleeping woman levitate four feet above her bed and see a world-class prima ballerina, flown in from Berlin, dance at a trailer-park opera house. I will glimpse half- naked hipsters smeared with vibrant colors frolic in the cold desert wind, and eavesdrop on middle-aged locals with the sunken faces of chemical dependency. I will be approached by a penniless stranger desperate to borrow a toothbrush, and I'll gawk at dinosaur bones and crystals nestled within the cracked shell of an old mobile home marinating in deep house music and starlight. Through it all I will wonder if art is enough to shift the fortunes of this small, hobbled town — and if the locals believe the art-as- salvation promise in the first place.

As the sky darkens on the first day, I retreat toward the berm that overlooks the one-square-mile dirt-road grid that is Bombay Beach, California. At first glance it looks like a postapocalyptic trailer park. Although the town has hundreds of properties, many of the modular homes are crumbling and only about 300 people live here, with a median household income of less than $14,000 a year. Twenty miles from the nearest gas station or supermarket and an hour southeast of booming Palm Springs, Bombay Beach is a town where reliable work is scarce and meth addiction widespread, where both the sea and the air are feared to be toxic. A handful of retirees subsist on fixed incomes, and other residents survive without water or power — which means no air-conditioning or fans in the brutal summers, when temperatures can reach 120 degrees.

And yet it is here that three wealthy, well-connected friends have launched a radical experiment in art, culture and regeneration. In the process, they're raising significant questions about a community on the precipice of change: Namely, is Bombay Beach becoming just another elitist playground, or is something deeper happening in this desert town built on the cracked foundation of a mistake?



•••

In 1905 the Imperial Canal, which brought Colorado River water to farms in the southern California desert, breached. By the time the engineers completed their fix, in 1907, they'd accidentally created the largest lake in California. It was named the Salton Sea.

Beginning in 1959, celebrities including Jerry Lewis, Frank Sinatra and the Beach Boys water-skied and partied in the area. The lake was stocked with fish to lure anglers and vacationers, who built second homes along the shore — then a 1981 flood destroyed the local yacht club. A spike in the lake's salinity, combined with toxic algae blooms caused by agricultural runoff, resulted in a biblical fish kill. Dead tilapia by the thousands washed up onshore (and still do), their bones degrading in huge drifts. It didn't take long for the tourist economy and the town itself to wither.

In 2007, Tao Ruspoli, a photographer and filmmaker with royal Roman bloodlines, opened a Kim Stringfellow photography book and saw pictures of the Salton Sea for the first time. Within days he was in Bombay Beach. "It looked like this dark underbelly of the American dream," Ruspoli says. "I was married at the time, and I said to my wife, 'We could buy a house in Bombay Beach for the price of a used Jetta.' " His wife (the actress Olivia Wilde, whom he'd married in 2003) didn't bite, but when they divorced in 2011, his first move was to buy property in the area. He started spending weekends by the lake, and in 2015 he brought Stefan Ashkenazy to town.

Part carnival barker, part hospitality impresario, Ashkenazy owns the Petit Ermitage boutique hotel in West Hollywood. In 2015 he had plans to host a pop-up hotel experience in Joshua Tree, but when he arrived in Bombay Beach, he torched those plans on the spot — despite the smell, the dead fish, the flies and all the other things he'd been warned about. "The idea transformed from communing with nature to commiserating with it," Ashkenazy says. He and Ruspoli seized on the idea of bringing high-caliber art, ballet and even opera to a town in tatters.

They called in another friend, Lily Johnson White, an heir to the Johnson & Johnson fortune. White sits on the board of Creative Time, a nonprofit that funds and produces ambitious public art projects. "I really wanted to focus on bringing emerging or established artists out and see how they reacted to the space, and how they would create work that was in dialogue with the town and the community," White says.

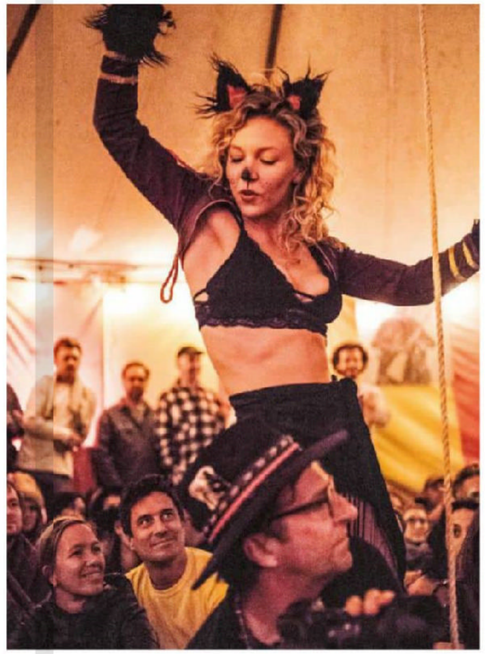
Together, in April 2016, they launched what they call "year zero" of the Biennale. The event was modest. Ashkenazy called in artist Greg Haberny to create an installation out of one of the few properties he owned at the time. Haberny was urged to purchase a junk plane and



Left: Highlights of the year-round Bombay Beach Drive-In include muscle-car seating and French cinema. **Top:** Olivia Steele's fiery I Still Love You installation lit up the lake at dusk and dawn each day of the Biennale.

Right: In 1944, B-29 pilots training for Hiroshima dropped a 10,000-pound payload onto targets in the Salton Sea. Local legend has it that one dummy bomb landed onshore — hence the name of the town, and of artist Joe Regan's Bomb Bay Shelter.

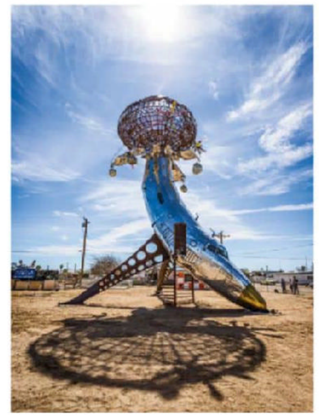
When exhibited in a place where poverty and beauty, desecration and promise collide, art is elevated.



Above: A performer heats up the big-top tent during Toledo Diamond's sexy spoken-word performance on opening night of the 2019 Biennale. The show christened a new circusthemed venue called Showtown.



Below: Kenny Scharf's signature Day-Glo masterpieces— constructed from salvaged trash and plastic toys— reflect the pop artist's long-standing concern for the environment. He describes Bombay Boom! as his famous Cosmic Cavern installation "turned inside out."





Left: Randy Polumbo's five-story Lodestar serves as a watchtower; visitors can climb the fuselage for 360-degree views of raw desert that from on high looks like the surface of a strange planet.





Above: The Biennale's culmination: a surreal sunrise opera performance by Ariana Vafadari. **Right:** Stephanie Cate's Toxic Tea for Two is a reminder of the lake's continuing decline despite more than 15 years of environmental legislation and restoration efforts. **Below:** Neon-light wizard Olivia Steele's Paradise, Abandoned, housed in a crumbling waterfront shack, reflects a weekend (and a town) of paradoxes. **Opposite:** Kirk Kunihiro and Huy Ngoc-Quang Tran's Discard, a (functional) trash receptacle inspired by regeneration.





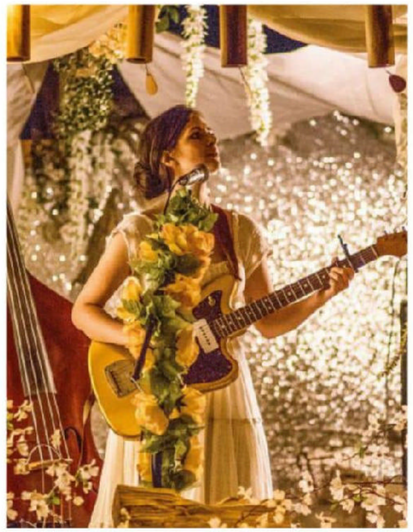
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Top: Artist Greg Haberny (left) and the event's organizers, including Tao Ruspoli (above), hope the arts community will bring attention to local social and environmental issues. **Left:** Foundation Foundation is the Biennale's first permanent addition to the town of Bombay Beach.



Above: Vera Sola, a haunting, velvet-voiced folksinger-songwriter (and daughter of Dan Aykroyd), jams with her band through a paneless window frame on Saturday night. **Opposite:** A flexing luchador and hipsters in party dresses crunched across the smelly, bone-carpeted beach to preen on The Water Ain't That Bad, It's Just Salty—a submerged steel swing constructed by Chris "Ssippi" Wessman and Damon James Duke.

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stage some sort of crash, but the artist — a former soap actor who had gone from the set of *One Life to Live* to a life of struggle making art in New York and Baltimore — opted to rebuild.

"I didn't want to add more carnage to the landscape," Haberny says. In his hands, the building, which was filled with nesting birds, fist-size spiders and scorpions when he arrived, became Foundation Foundation, Bombay Beach's first art museum, which now hosts residencies for willing artists.

In 2017, more properties were purchased and transformed, and White recruited legendary street artist Kenny Scharf. To create his installation, Scharf piled the roof of a crumbling home with plastic junk he'd collected from the streets of L.A. and swirled the walls and windows with his signature fluorescent monsters.

Ruspoli estimates some 30 artists now own more than 50 properties in town. They're still a minority, but they are a force, in part because of the stunning public works they leave behind — Steve Shigley's metallic cubes, Olivia Steele's neon-light installations, Randy Polumbo's masterwork *Lodestar*, a 47-foot high sculpture carved out of a World War II jet purchased on Craigslist.

But Ruspoli and company weren't the first artists to set up shop here: Predating the festival by three years is the Bombay Beach Arts & Culture Center, run by Dave Day, who has owned property and lived at least part-time in the town for the past 22 years. An artist in his own right, Day has long been inspired by the Japanese ceramics process *kintsugi*, in which a broken pot is bonded with silver or gold. "In the process of being broken and then put back together," he says, "it becomes something more."

Under his watch, the center hosts Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and offers public showers and free breakfasts to impoverished residents. Day also houses artists who spend part of the year working in town and generally serves as a bridge between both worlds. When I ask him if the art movement in Bombay Beach has helped the town, he pauses and smiles.

"We'll see," he says. "The jury is still out." The community is primarily white retirees, with fluctuating populations of other demographics, but meth doesn't discriminate: "It goes along with people dealing with boredom and hopelessness."

• • •

When the first Biennale launched, local opposition was widespread. According to Day, area retirees weren't fond of the hedonistic displays that came with it — the scantily clad attendees, the all night psychedelic dance parties.

"It could have been a good thing if they'd come into the town and been respectful to the people who live here," says Gloria Town, a year-round resident and active community member. "But they feel entitled to do whatever they want."

That sentiment has mellowed somewhat. "It's probably 50-50 pro and con," says James Andrews, another permanent resident. "I love it because it's only a week or two out of the year, and it brings a little life to the beach. It definitely helps the local economy."

Some locals and members of the artist community hang out socially, both during and beyond Biennale season. The latter also patronize the Ski Inn, the town's sole watering hole, and attend community board meetings. Day adds, "The event organizers are seeing the benefit of meeting and addressing the needs of the community rather than just being a big fiesta for family and friends and the artists — something we've been stressing and working on since it started." In the days following the 2019 Biennale, organizers take steps to fund a waste-management pilot program and install solar streetlights. But as the town's fortunes rise, there are other costs to consider.

Nowhere are the potential implications of growth more acutely



rendered than in an installation by an artist known as Jae Fella, who created signs for Sotheby's International Reality [sic] and placed them on several properties in town. He also built a fake real estate office and, in its window, posted listings for multi million-dollar properties that had been worth $500 just two years earlier. The fact that some property values have risen to more than $30,000 suggests life is already imitating art. Ashkenazy plans to open a hotel in town called the Last Resort. If Bombay Beach gentrifies further, where will that leave its current residents?

"If I were to have a personal goal, it would be to see artists, who were never able to afford real estate, move here, reside and create, live and die," Day says. "If it gets to where the people with the most money buy the most lots all at once and build big campuses, then it makes it a little more challenging."

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Among the 500 or so people who have flocked to this year's Biennale, those questions are for another time.

The event peaks on Saturday night, unfurling like a chooseyour-own art adventure. A marching band and two stilted dancers dressed like a bride and groom on their way to a funeral lead a sunset parade. Blissed-out bohemians pack a bandstand to enjoy a stunning ballet performance at the Opera House, and a line of people wait to glimpse Haberny's abstract paintings and wood collages — their own form of *kintsugi* — at Foundation. To create the pieces, he bought back his previously sold work, chopped up the canvases, burned them to ash and used it as paint.

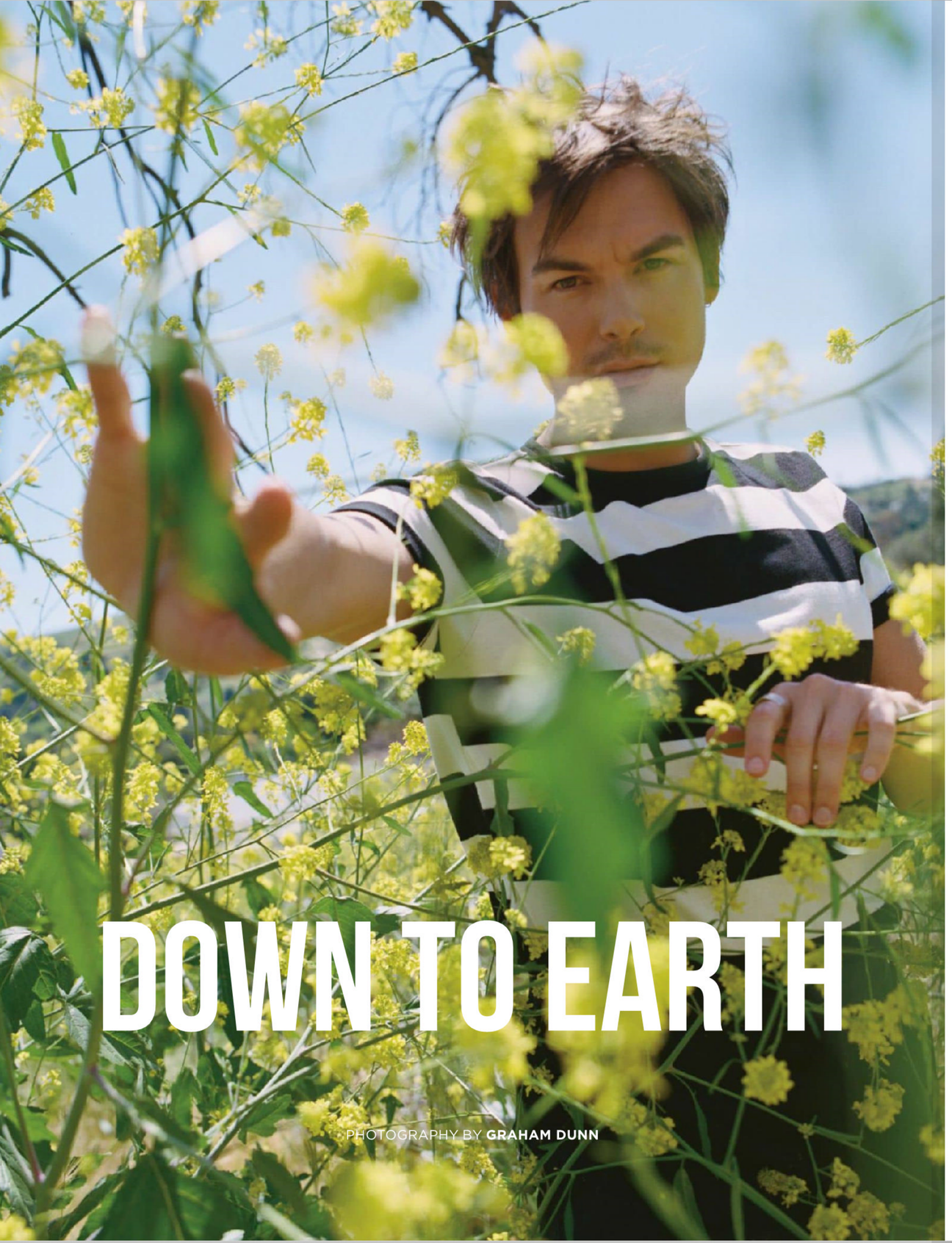
Eventually everyone spills into the Estates, Ashkenazy's derelict property, where acclaimed KCRW DJ Jeremy Sole's eclectic, genre-bending grooves bounce off graffitied cinder-block walls.

I roam the galleries, get down on my knees to look a triceratops in the eye and stand tall to measure myself against amethyst boulders cracked wide open. I mingle and dance among revelers in colorful galleries festooned with toilet bowl brushes.

All the while, I can't help but believe that perhaps art is the great antidote after all — not just for this town but for what ails people everywhere. We may not live by a toxic lake, but we consume way too much plastic and industrial food. Our trash is collected for us, but it piles up somewhere. The gears of our existence run smoothly and feel antiseptic, but nothing is. We're deluged with advertising and curated content to the point of anxious distraction. Art, on the other hand, exists only in a specific time and space. It's threedimensional and real, fashioned from raw or found materials and creative force. And when it's exhibited in a place like Bombay Beach, where poverty and beauty, desecration and promise collide, that art, and the charge it delivers, is elevated.

At sunrise, French-Iranian opera singer Ariana Vafadari performs on the beach with a small band for the night's survivors. They wear angel wings or faux fur or are dressed like desert gypsies. Colorful smoke grenades are set off behind the virtuoso mezzo-soprano as she sings her Zoroastrian songs of praise. The sky blushes pink. There is beauty and there is reverence.

Bombay Beach has become a wonderland. ■



DOWN TO EARTH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **GRAHAM DUNN**

Tyler Blackburn, star of **Pretty Little Liars** and the Roswell reboot, is proud to be a man who isn't the poster child for anything but his own path

BY **RYAN GAJEWSKI**

I've never met Tyler Blackburn before — except that I have. Maybe it would be more accurate to say I've met versions of Tyler Blackburn. I've spent time with the actor on multiple occasions while covering his TV series *Pretty Little Liars*, the soapy teen- centered murder mystery that regularly generated more than a million tweets throughout its seven-season run. Just two weeks ago I reconnected with him in a lush meadow of flowering mustard outside Angeles National Forest, the site of his PLAYBIY photo shoot. But the Tyler Blackburn I'm meeting today at his home in the Atwater Village neighborhood of Los Angeles is in many ways an entirely different man.

When he greets me at the front door, Blackburn is relaxed, barefoot and still wearing what appears to be bed head. His disposition is unmistakably freer — lighter — than it's been during our previous encounters. Perhaps I shouldn't be surprised by this. Six days earlier the 32-year-old actor came out publicly as bisexual in an online interview with *The Advocate*. The announcement is clearly at the forefront of his mind as we sit down at his dining room table.

Almost immediately he starts to gush about the positive, and at times overwhelming, feedback he has received over the past few days. Within minutes he's in tears. He tries to lighten the mood with a self-effacing quip, but now I'm in tears too. Then he tells me he can't remember my question.

I haven't even asked one yet, I reply.

"It just makes me feel, *Wow*, the world's a little bit safer than I thought it was," Blackburn says.

The most affecting response he's received thus far has been from his father, whom Blackburn didn't meet until he was five years old. Although he avoids offering any more details about that early chapter, he says, "Feeling like I'm a little bit different always made me wonder if he likes me, approves of me, loves me. He called, and it was just every single thing you would want to hear from your dad: 'That was a bold move. I'm so proud of you.' It was wild."

Blackburn can't pinpoint the exact moment he knew he was bisexual but says he was curious from the age of 16. It wasn't until two years ago, though, that he decided to approach his publicity team about coming out publicly. At that point, *Pretty Little Liars* had wrapped, and the actor was without a job. So Blackburn and his team agreed they needed to hold off on making an announcement until his career was stable again. The lack of resolution weighed on him.

"A year ago I was in a very bad place," he says, adding that he has struggled with depression and anxiety. "I didn't know what my career was going to be or where it was going. My personal life — my relationship with myself — was in a really bad place."

His casting on the CW's *Roswell, New Mexico,* adapted from the same Melinda Metz book series as the WB's 1999 cult favorite Roswell, seems to have come at the right time. Blackburn portrays Alex, a gay Army veteran whose relationship with Michael, a bisexual alien, has attracted legions of "Malex" devotees since the show's January debut. *Roswell, New Mexico* has already been renewed for a second season — a feat for any series in this era of streaming, let alone one involving gay exophilia.

Playing a character whose queerness has been so widely embraced by fans no doubt nudged Blackburn closer to revealing his truth for the first time since becoming an actor 15 years ago. (As he told *The Advocate*, "I'm so tired of caring so much. I just want to…feel okay with experiencing love and experiencing self-love.") Still, he was somewhat reluctant. His hesitation was rooted in the fact that he wouldn't be able to control what came next: the social pressures that often come with being one of the first — in his case, one of the first openly bisexual male actors to lead a prime-time television series.

"If you stand for this thing, and you say it publicly, there's suddenly the expectation of 'Now your job is *this*,' " he says. "Even if someone's like, 'Now you're going to go be



the spokesperson' — well, no. If I don't want to, I don't want to. And that doesn't mean I'm a half-assed queer."

• • •

Full disclosure: I previously wrote for a *Pretty Little Liars* fan site. In 2012 I published a listicle that ranked the show's hottest male characters. Blackburn cracks up when I tell him this and wants to know whether he bested Ian Harding, his former co-star. After I inform him that his character (hacker with a heart of gold Caleb Rivers) finished second behind Harding's (Ezra Fitz, a student-dating teacher) I promise to organize a recount. The always-modest Blackburn concedes that Harding is the rightful winner. (If anyone ever compiles a BuzzFeed article titled "Most Embarrassing Moments for Former Bloggers," I'll be offended if I'm not in the mix.)

Blackburn makes it clear that he has not always been comfortable with his status as a teen heartthrob. Knowing he was queer made it "hard to embrace it and enjoy it." Growing up, he was bullied for being perceived as effeminate and was frequently subjected to slurs and homophobic jokes. He describes himself as a late bloomer who took longer than usual to shed his baby fat. He didn't have many friends, nor did he date much in high school.

A lifelong fan of musical theater and the performing arts, Blackburn signed with a Hollywood management company at the age of 17. His team at the time warned him that projecting femininity would hinder his success. An especially painful moment came after he'd auditioned for a role as a soldier and the producers wrote back that Blackburn had seemed "a little gay."

"Those two managers were so twisted in their advice to me," Blackburn says. "They just said, 'We don't care if you are, but no one can know. You can't walk into these rooms and seem gay. It's not gonna work.' I remember the shame, because I've been dealing with the feeling that I'm not a normal boy for my entire life."

After landing a recurring role on *Days of Our Lives* in 2010, Blackburn scored his big break when he appeared midway through the first season of Pretty Little Liars. "I was in Tyler's first scene, so I got to be one of the first to work with him," Shay Mitchell, who starred opposite Blackburn, tells PLAYBOY. "Right away, I knew he was special. Since the day I met him, Tyler always struck me as very authentic and very true to himself."

Fans instantly adored his on-screen love affair with Hanna Marin, played by Ashley Benson. The pair became known as "Haleb," and Blackburn went on to win three Teen Choice Awards — surfboard trophies that solidify one's status as a teen idol — in categories including Choice TV: Chemistry.

According to Blackburn, during the show's seven years on the air, he and Benson bonded over their mutual distaste for the tabloid stardom that comes with headlining a TV phenomenon lapped up by teens. Today he fondly reflects on their on-camera chemistry. "It felt good," he says. "It felt real."

Of course, rumors swirled that the pair's romance was actually quite real. "We never officially dated," he tells me. "In navigating our relationship — as co-workers but also as friends — sometimes the lines blurred a little. We had periods when we felt more for each other, but ultimately we're good buds. For the most part, those rumors made us laugh. But then sometimes we'd be like, 'Did someone see us hugging the other night?' She was a huge part of a huge change in my life, so I'll always hold her dear."

Blackburn also shares a unique connection with Mitchell outside their friendship. Similar to what Blackburn is now experiencing with Roswell, Mitchell was embraced by the LGBTQ community for playing a lesbian character, Emily Fields, whose same-sex romances on *Pretty Little Liars* were among the first on ABC Family (the former name of the Freeform network).

Over the years, Blackburn had come out to select members of the *Pretty Little Liars* cast and crew, including creator I. Marlene King. But as the show approached its swan song, he started to recognize how hiding a part of himself was negatively affecting his life. He entered his first serious relationship with a man while filming the show's final season. Not knowing how to tell co- workers — or whether to, say, invite his boyfriend to an afterparty — caused him to "go into a little bit of a shell" on the set.

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STYLING BY EVAN SIMONTSCH. PAGE 162: SHIRT BY APC. LEFT: SHIRT BY APC, PANTS BY ALLSAINTS; RIGHT: SHIRT BY THE KOOPLES, TANK TOP BY CALVIN KLEIN, PANTS BY CITIZENS OF HUMANITY

"My boyfriend was hanging out with me at a *Pretty Little Liars* convention, and some of the fans were like, 'Are you Tyler's brother?' " Blackburn says. "He was very patient, but then afterward he was like, 'That kind of hurt me.' It was a big part of why we didn't work out, just because he was at a different place than I was. Unfortunately, we don't really talk anymore, but if he reads this, I hope he knows that he helped me so much in so many ways." At that, Blackburn tearfully excuses himself and takes a private moment to regain his composure.

"I never remember a time when I didn't enjoy being with him," says Harding, Blackburn's former co-star. He says he saw the actor "start to become the person he is now when we worked together" but believes Blackburn needed to first come to terms with the idea that he could become "the face" of bisexuality. "Tyler's discovering a way to bring real meaning with his presence in the world," Harding says, "as an actor and as a whole human."

• • •

Once the teenage Blackburn realized he was attracted to guys, he began "experimenting" with men while taking care not to become too emotionally attached. "I just didn't feel I had the inner strength or the certainty that it was okay," he says. It wasn't until a decade later, at the age of 26, that he began to "actively embrace my bisexuality and start dating men, or at least open myself up to the idea." He says he's been in love with two women and had great relationships with both, but he "just knew that wasn't the whole story."

He was able to enjoy being single in his 20s in part because he wasn't confident enough in his identity to commit to any one person in a relationship. "I had to really be patient with myself — and more so with men," he says. "Certain things are much easier with women, just anatomically, and there's a freedom in that." He came out of that period with an appreciation for romance and intimacy. Sex without an emotional component, he discovered, didn't have much appeal.

"As I got older, I realized good sex is when you really have something between the two of you," says Blackburn, who's now dating an "amazing" guy. "It's not just a body. The more I've realized that, the more able I am to be settled in my sexuality. I'm freer in my sexuality now. I'm very sexual; it's a beautiful aspect of life."

Blackburn has, however, felt resistance from the LGBTQ community, particularly when bisexual women have questioned his orientation. "Once I decided to date men, I was like, Please just let me be gay and be okay with that, because it would be a lot fucking easier. At times, bisexuality feels like a big gray zone," he says. (For example, Blackburn knows his sexuality may complicate how he becomes a father.) "I've had to check myself and say, I know how I felt when I was in love with women and when I slept with women. That was true and real. Don't discredit that, because you're feeding into what other people think about bisexuality."

Blackburn finds it funny that he's known for young-skewing TV shows; the question is, What might define him next? He's grateful for his career, but he grew up wanting to make edgy dramas like the young Leonardo DiCaprio. He also cites an admiration for Ezra Miller, the queer actor who plays the Flash. "I most definitely want to be a fucking superhero one day," Blackburn says a bit wistfully.

His path to cape wearing does look more tenable. The day before his *Advocate* interview was posted, he booked a lead role in a fact-based disaster-survival film opposite Josh Duhamel. Blackburn jokes that his movie career was previously nonexistent, though his résumé features such thoughtful indie fare as 2017 vignette-driven *Hello Again*. There, he plays a love interest to T.R. Knight, who tells PLAYBOY that Blackburn "embraces the challenge to stretch and not choose the easy path."

For now, Blackburn's path appears to be just where he needs it to be. "I may never want to be a spokesperson in a huge way, but honestly, being truthful and authentic sets a great example," he says. "To continue on a path of fulfillment and happiness is going to make people feel like they too can have that and it doesn't need to be some spectacle." As it turns out, he may already be a superhero. ■

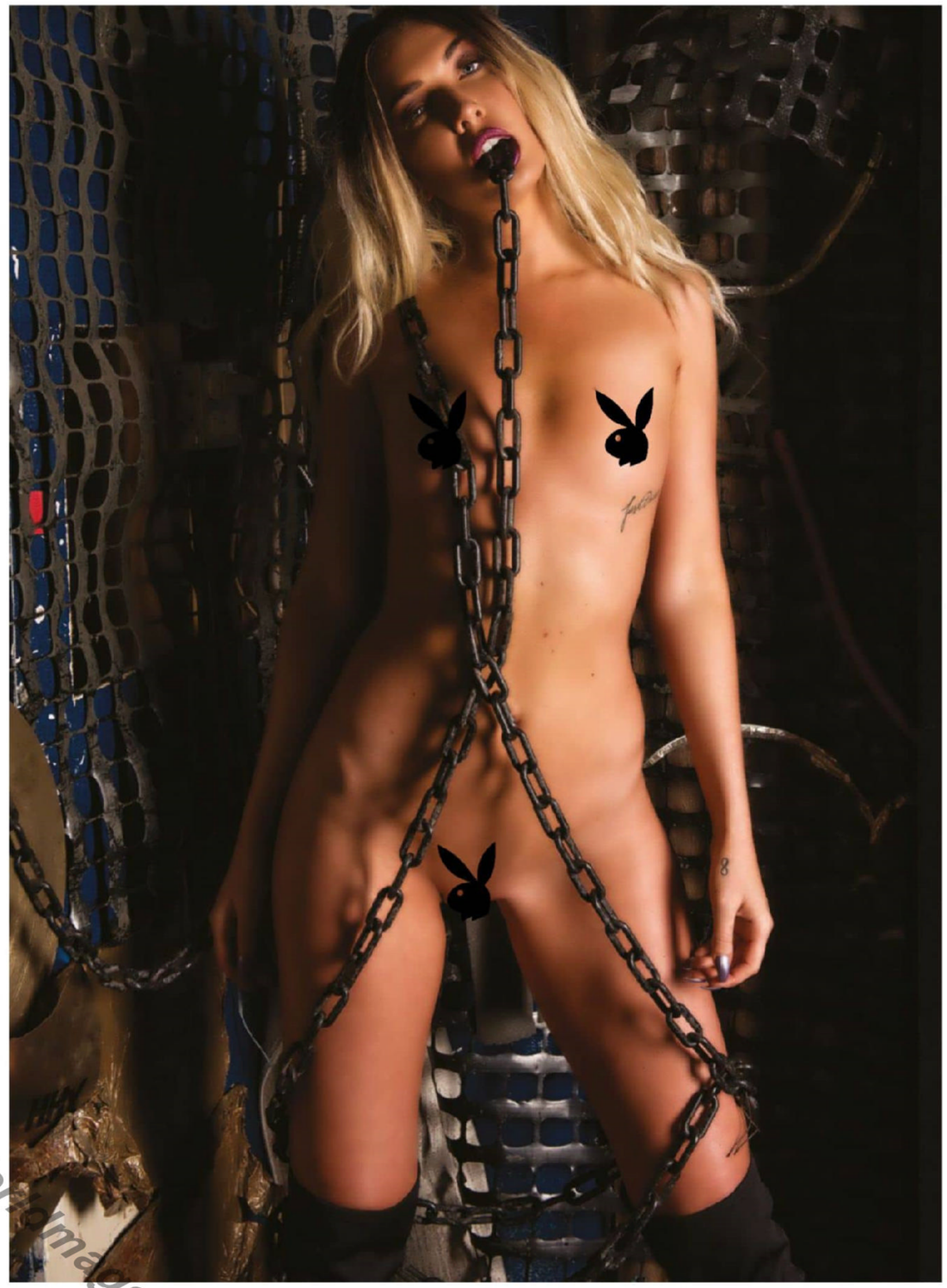




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Describe yourself in three words
Eccentric, Introspective, Loyal.

What do you enjoy most about what you do?
The glitz and glam is so fun for me, I love the transformation – but the travel and destination shoots have been the most rewarding for me. I think it teaches us so much about ourselves and the world to be out of our comfort zone. New languages, food, and cultures. You meet beautiful people, see historic monuments and taste some of the worlds delicacy's... No amount of money can make you that rich.

A guilty pleasure?
My kryptonite is defiantly buttery movie popcorn, with melted m&m's. Honestly any kind of popcorn, I just need it all the time!!

What would you say is your best feature?
I personally find my eyes to be incredibly unique. They have certainly gotten me into some trouble too. Being that they change from a crystal blue, to a mysterious grey depending on the weather and my mood is always a topic of conversation. Generally, people will ask what nationality, or if I'm wearing contacts because they are just enticing. During shoots most photographers will say I've nailed most of the looks just from opening my eyes. In this industry the "smize" is everything – proud I've got one of a kind.

What makes you feel sexy?
Nothing beats the adrenaline and satisfaction I feel after taking a dance class. The sweat, heart racing, hair dripping exhaustion honestly gets me in the mood. Generally, at the end of the class we all take turns performing the routine, and being in the dim lights, starting at yourself in the mirror glistening in hard work is sexier than ever. The talent in one room + your own tone is top notch sex appeal.

What advice would you give to women aspiring to get into modelling?
Understand your intent before getting into the industry, and really understand your own worth and strength. It takes a lot out of you to be rejected on a daily basis, specially now with social media being such a huge part of the world. Creating content needs to come from a place of confidence, not from needing attention or value out of likes. That I think is the biggest shift in someone's success – just going after something for a purpose that isn't "fame" or "followers. I knew that nude modelling was my calling because it gave me the ability to protect myself and make decisions about my body. Nowadays everyone is making up a women's mind about how she should dress, how she should act, and what she should look like – but it's ultimately your body and your life so I valued that I was able to choose who saw what, and how they saw me. It was vulnerable yet empowering to be the centrefold or a men's magazine. Because I took the power back. So if any women wants to be a glamour model, you have to have drive and courage to be disliked. Because no one likes someone who just doesn't give a f*ck.

Favourite Shoot Location?
The most beautiful place in the world I've traveled was Turks and Caicos. I can't wait to go back and shoot those clear blue waters. It's peaceful, exotic, and not too hot you sweat your hair and makeup off. The town is small but the locals are truly welcoming. I've never been to New York so I can imagine that would be a competition of favourite destination.

Do you prefer kissing or cuddling?
With the right person, both! I think those are both intimate actions that should be held on a pedestal for someone worth your time... When you are in close quarters the sharing on energy is so special. Those firework kisses, that actually explode every ounce and fibre of your consciousness, I live for! Where you can feel your heart in your throat and your chest gets tight. You breath in and hold your breath with a magnitude of passion. Incredible!!!

What are you really good at?
I have trained my whole life in the entertainment world, ie; modeling/dance/acting – so I would say after years of hard work I'm defiantly meant to be on stage – but a lot of people don't know my passion is writing. I've been published a couple times and it's something I take extreme pride in. I can say I am better the most at articulating my soul on to the paper.

What is one thing people may be surprised to find out about you?
Most people are always shocked to realize that I was bullied a lot as a kid. It never seems to go through anyone's mind that a model would have confidence issues I was six feet at twelve years old, had a gummy smile and was slender which meant flat chested. As a teen you



dream or having these glorious large breasts and I think back in the day most magazines were showcasing lingerie on women that were voluptuous. So for me it was a challenge to consider myself a contender in the glamour world without getting breast implants. Now I'm able to laugh at it all – but I'm always open and honest about my journey because I think being real about our insecurities makes us human.

Do you have a catchphrase?
I don't have a catch phrase but I always say "Feel the Fear, and Do It Anyways" and "A certain darkness is needed to see the stars" I've really lived by these two quotes and it's made appreciate my pain and valuing my courage. At my age I think that's an important lesson and I'm glad I've can pass that on.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY
DANA TRIPPE

STYLING BY
ANNIE & HANNAH

He's energetic, slick and clever, and he celebrates gender and sexuality as much as he questions it. Here's hoping the world is ready for

AVAN JOGIA

BY **SANDRA SONG**

Avan Jogia is upset. Or maybe riled up is a better way to put it. An enthusiastic gesticulator prone to fiery, pathos-driven argument, the 27-year-old actor, author and director is currently railing against the constraints of masculinity. At one point his forceful motioning causes an unceremonious collision of his head against the concrete wall behind him.

Bam! He curses, pausing to take stock before quickly reverting to his breezy, Hollywood- engineered disposition.

"Anyway.…"

Jogia smiles and expresses a sentiment he'll repeat several times in the course of our hour-long conversation. "It's just weird. I refuse to be told who or what I am," he says.

Unfortunately, that's precisely my job, something he jokes about as we embark on a discussion about preferred pronouns. "'*He* feels limiting, yet here I am; here *he* is." Jogia rolls his eyes. "As soon as you say '*This* is what a man can be,' you've ruined manhood. By labeling what it can be, you're actually limiting it."

A beat passes, and then: "Sorry, I'm ranting again."

Jogia, once a fixture on Nickelodeon (mainly via the series *Victorious*, which a lso featured a promising upstart named Ariana Grande) and now an in-demand actor (he's the lead on *Now Apocalypse*, w hich p remiered on Starz in March), speaks at times with the sort of hesitation common among celebrities who are conscious of the way the world watches them. But Jogia is far more prone to overexplaining than evading — perhaps out of fear of being misquoted, or perhaps because he doesn't want to leave any room for confusion.

"The weirdest part is observing yourself through the eyes of someone else," he says, absentmindedly rubbing the back of his head in between sips of iced coffee. "That never happens in real life. Usually you make an impression and you walk away."

My immediate thought, though, is that Jogia most definitely makes an impression that sticks with people. For example, today his look is "casual," which for him means no purple faux furs, holographic sunglasses or two-toned leopard-print buzz cuts. Instead he's channeling 1970s suave, his leisure suit opened to display carefully manicured chest hair — though the choice to dress head to toe in pink linen ends up turning heads outside the chain coffee shop we're sitting at.

"As soon as you name something, it loses an element of what it is, because it's been so unceremoniously defined," Jogia says, explaining that it's human nature to try to classify the world around us. He later adds, "But as far as labeling my sexuality, I don't gain anything from that, because all it does is isolate the possibilities of my life. It's the same thing with gender. If I say 'I'm a man' — whatever that means — I'm limiting the depth of my humanity."

Jogia's goal is to provide options for other people, particularly "little brown kids" who need to know that "we're not a monolith," that there are a myriad of intersectional identities they can occupy outside some de facto norm.

"That's why I have to be loud," he says. "My goal is to try to display something different so there are options for who you can be."

In Jogia's view, the only idea of masculinity the media presents today is an intensely "buttoned-down version" that lacks room for deviation. Long gone are the days of David Bowie and Prince, his childhood heroes. Instead, all the kids have now is that "singular, leather-jacketwearing, chestnut-brown-haired guy."

To Jogia, the pinnacle of masculinity was his father, who was "the strongest man" he knew despite the fact that Indian men are often emasculated — something Jogia says he experienced when he could audition only for "goofy Asian male sidekick" roles, none of which he'd end up getting anyway.

In the past decade Jogia has managed to morph into a Hollywood hotshot with an impressive level of creative freedom. This June he'll appear in the sequel to Shaft and in October in *Double Tap*, the second *Zombieland* installment. He's also directing his first full-length film, an "electric, fun little punk-rock movie" called Door Mouse.

His takeaway from all this? Maybe it's best to "lose people," namely the family-friendly audiences who propelled him to top billing in the first place. "The biggest lie would be to organize my life to appease more people," he says.

That attitude is evident in his choice to play transgressive "sexual astronaut" Ulysses in Now Apocalypse. Helmed by Gregg Araki, a luminary of the 1990s New Queer Cinema movement, the series has faced an uphill battle gaining viewership and traction. Still, Jogia is happy to headline a show that depicts boundless sexuality as something worth celebrating. "I happen to think sexuality is fun," he deadpans. "Fucking shocking, I know."

He did, however, have reservations about taking on the Ulysses character. Recalling a conversation he had with Araki, Jogia approaches the question of the limits, and constraints, of allyship — especially for a straightpresenting cis-man.

"Uly's queerness isn't the totality of who he is. Gregg said to me, 'There's a part of you, a part of your soul, that makes you right for this person.' It's an aspect of who he is, but that's not the character," Jogia says. "It's not a one-note character — it's a human being, and human beings have a lot of currents."

Although he avoids addressing his quiet parting from Straight But Not Narrow, the LGBTQ-ally organization he co-founded, Jogia is reinvigorated by my question about the importance of sexuality in his life and how he chooses to present it to the world. "Why would I purposefully make it boring for me?" he says. "Because of pride or fear or guilt? No!"

He pauses for a moment before paraphrasing legendary queer cabaret artist David Hoyle. "We're all going to die. The world's burning," he says, laughing and wiggling his shoulders. He slightly extends his arms into the air, and a grin spreads across his face.

"Let's masturbate."

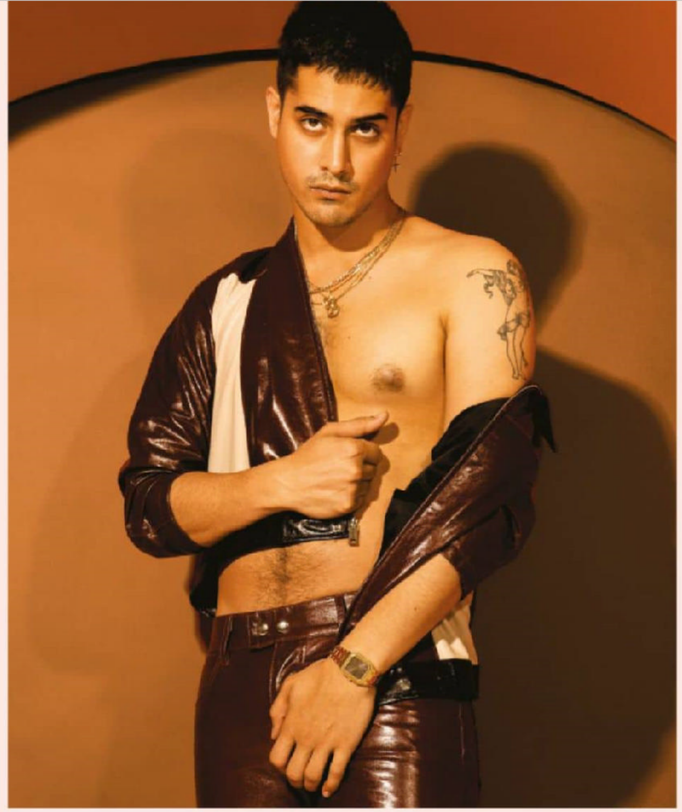
I tell him that sounds wonderful.

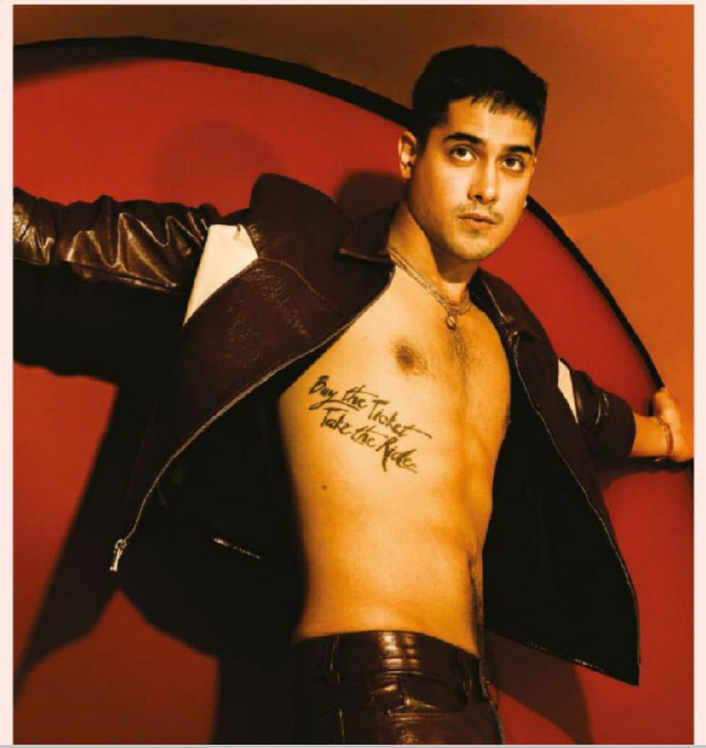
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PREVIOUS SPREAD AND PAGE 104: SHEER VINTAGE SHIRT; PANTS AND BELT FROM PALACE COSTUME. JEWELRY JOGIA'S OWN; RIGHT: JACKET BY ENFANTS RICHES DÉPRIMÉS, JEANS BY AMI, BELT BY MARCELO BURLON COUNTY OF MILAN. JEWELRY JOGIA'S OWN








Buy the Ticket
Take the Ride



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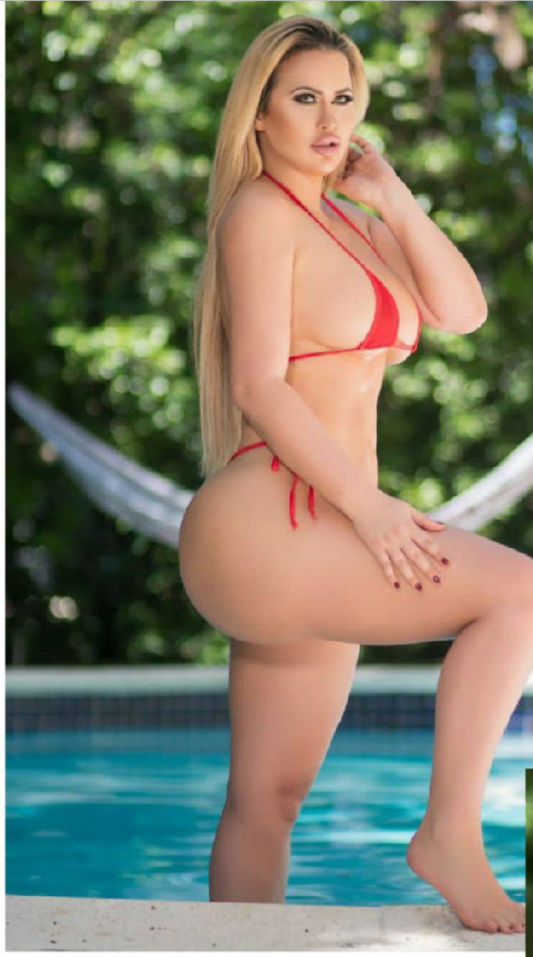


PAGE 105: JACKET AND PANTS BY ENFANTS RICHES DÉPRIMÉS, JEWELRY AND WATCH JOGIA'S OWN. THIS SPREAD: PINK SUIT BY WAN HUNG, NECKLACES AND WATCH JOGIA'S OWN, VINTAGE CHOKER AND BELT

ANDREA ABELI

@ANDREAABELI

Photography by JONATHAN CASTELLANOS JCSMOOTH PHOTOGRAPHY
HMUA JASON PICO @JAYPICOMAKEUP *Location* @TEAMPLUGGEDMANSION







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Tell us something surprising about you?
Ok don't laugh, but I pour my milk before the cereal

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Of course! WHO ISNT? IM NOW PART OF HISTORY

What inspires you?
A good challenge always inspires me!

Why did you choose to pursue a career in modelling?
I like to be pretty in front of the camera .. the attention is nice also sometimes

Who do you look up to in the modelling industry?
Adriana Lima

What are some of your hobbies?
Reading , tennis and horse back riding

Name three things on your bucket list?
Swim with sharks, visit japan and get into forbes magazine

Turn-ons?
10% body fat, tattoos, 6'5" and above

Turn-offs
Liars, poor hygiene ,

Describe to us your perfect date?
Flying private to Maldives for a dinner on the beach on a private island.

Which world capital would you most like to visit, and why?
Tokyo to visit Mount Fuji

What is your mantra?
WOW Really?





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Sunday Seduction

Story & Art by Sarah Maxwell

Good afternoon, folks!

Make sure to hydrate today...

PLAYBOY

...it's a hot one!

She sure is.

PLAYBOY

Click

Click

It's your Sunday speaker here.

Ugh.

Go ahead and try to save my soul.

It's blazing like Hell today.

I think it's too late...

...and its flames...

Hah!

...are burning.

gasp!

Be careful...

...for there are demons around.

What the—

Hey, baby.

It's that girl!

Oh God.

tyklmnpf

That's right, it's me...

kiss

ahh

...and I've come...

For the young and tempted...

...for you.

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...don't relent.

When you catch their fever...

...their fire...

mmm

Nnn

mm

Nnn

ahh

mm

ahh

haa

...you can't be saved.

AHH

lick

!

Why am I wet?

Where is...?

Was she...

...was it all a dream, then?

Or was it...

...real?

The End

THE TEN

BEST MOMENTS FROM E3 2019

Another year and another E3 has come and gone and even though big hitters like Sony and Activision decided to give this year a skip, the ultimate gaming convention of the year was still filled with incredible moments and jaw-dropping game reveals. We look at the 10 best moments from this year's E3.

1 | NO, YOU'RE BREATHTAKING
Arguably the biggest surprise at this year's Microsoft event was the big reveal of Keanu Reeves on stage at the CyberPunk 2077 showing. The crowd went crazy and Keanu was as adorable and charming as always. The second biggest cheer was heard when an audience member shouted out "you're breathtaking" to Keanu, only for the man of the moment to return the compliment, not just to the man in the audience but to every single person in the arena saying "you're all breathtaking".

2 | CYBERPUNK 2077
The biggest cheer however was saved for the epic trailer of Cyberpunk 2077, a 10-minute showcase packed with highlights from what is potentially the most anticipated game this decade, which ended off by revealing that Keanu Reeves as a character within the game. Set in a futuristic world and based on the Cyberpunk books and boardgame series, developers CD Projekt Red is well on course to changing gaming forever.

3 | BREATH OF THE WILD 2
Nintendo had a strong showing as always, with new trailers for upcoming games Luigi's Mansion 3, Animal Crossing: New Horizon and Pokemon Sword and Shield. The biggest surprise however was the reveal of the sequel to arguably the best game of all time Breath of the Wild. Although the trailer was light on details, just knowing a sequel is in production is fantastic news for all Nintendo fans

4 | ELDEN RING
Rumors were floating around that renowned Souls creators From Software and Game of Thrones mastermind George RR Martin had teamed up to create a brand-new epic RPG, it seemed almost too good to be true. Yet when the trailer dropped it was everything fans of the Soul series had imagined. Again, details are scarce but knowing the talent behind this game, this will be one of the greatest games ever made.

5 | XBOX PROJECT SCARLETT
One of the worst-kept secrets at this year's conference was the announcement of a brand-new next-gen Xbox. Officially announced for release next year, this powerhouse is what every gamer has dreamt of. The big focus is on reducing load times thanks to a built-in SSD, graphical capabilities will allow for 120FPS and 8K resolutions as well as keeping the backwards compatibility in place, allowing for four generations of games on the new system. It sounds like an absolute beast of a gaming console.

6 | HALO INFINITE
Initially revealed at the 2018 conference, Halo Infinite has now been confirmed as a launch title for the new Xbox in 2020. A short trailer was shown, and it looked amazing, continuing the story of everyone's favorite super-soldier Master Chief with eye-popping graphics and a sneaky little teaser of a returning Cortana at the end. Consider us hyped.

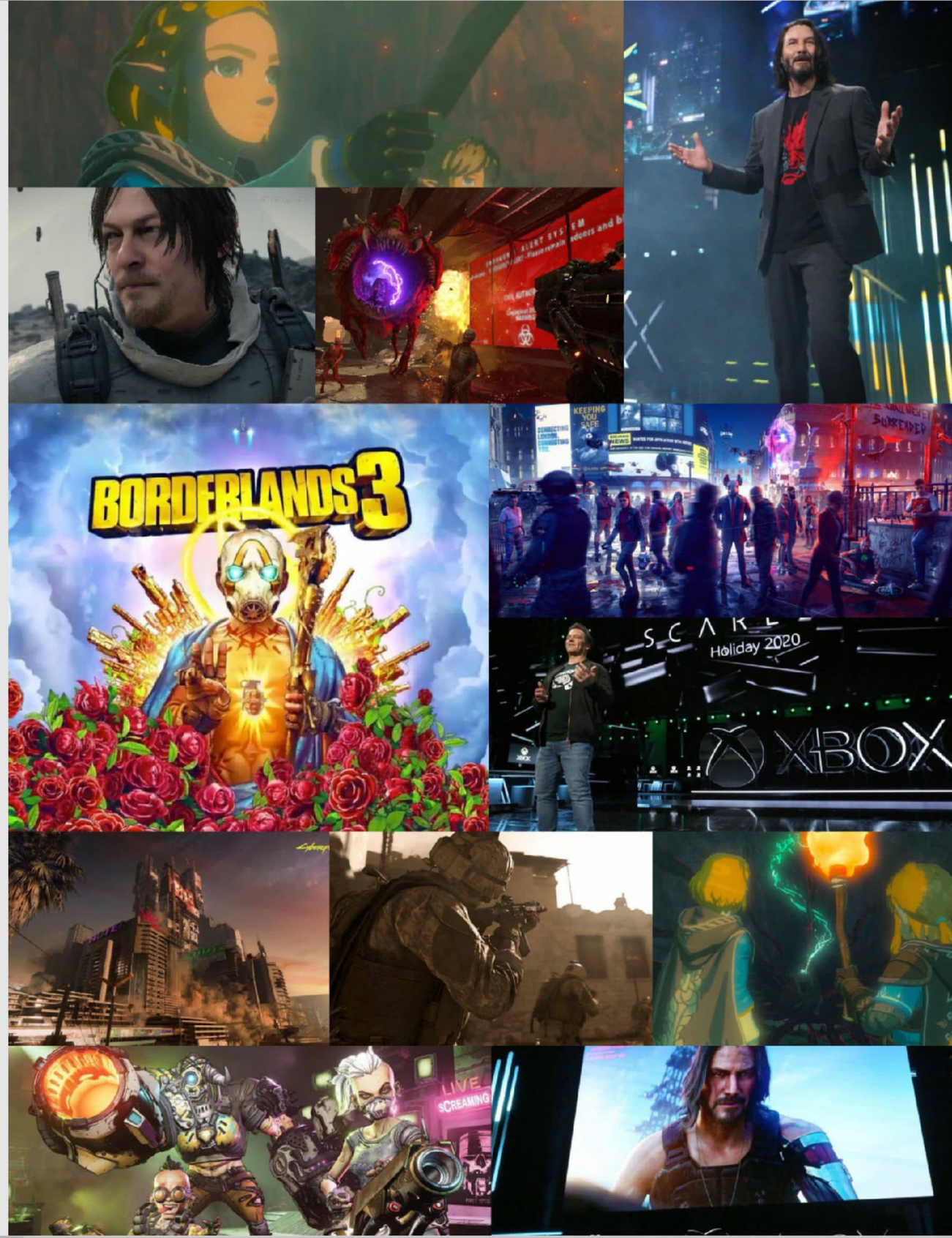
7 | FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE
When the remake was announced at the Sony Press Conference in 2015, fans were ecstatic and even naysayers were excited. Then everything went quiet and people started theorizing that it might never happen. However, at the Square Enix conference full gameplay footage was shown with a release date in 2020. It's truly everything fans wanted from the remake and it looks to be a game changer once again, 23 years later.

8 | STAR WARS JEDI: FALLEN ORDER
After the debacle of the Battleground series, EA desperately needed to prove that they can deliver a Star Wars game that fans of the franchise deserved and with Fallen Order it looks like they might just get it right. A third person single player experience headed up by developers Respawn (Titanfall and Apex: Legends creators), Fallen Order hits all the right notes for fans of a galaxy far, far away.

9 | DOOM ETERNAL
With the super successful reboot of the popular Doom franchise, Bethesda unleashed the follow up which looks more brutal, more violent and faster than the previous release. It's everything one would want from a Doom follow up with bigger weapons, bigger enemies and more heavy metal violence you can shake a chainsaw at.

10 | WATCH DOGS LEGION
The Watch Dogs series travels across the pond to a near future setting in London that's become a drone-filled, cyberpunk surveillance state plagued by extremist and organized crime. The difference this time however is you can play as practically any NPC drafted into the DEDSEC resistance movement. Hacking an entire city as a foul-mouthed hacker grandma has never felt so good.

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4 EXCITING GAMES

TO LOOK FORWARD TO IN 2019

So far, 2019 has been a stellar year for games, from the punishing difficulty of Sekiro to the demon-slaying combo-filled joy of Devil May Cry 5 to the controller gripping suspense and zombie-infested remake of Resident Evil 2. But we are only halfway through the year and these are the 4 games of 2019 we are most excited about.

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE

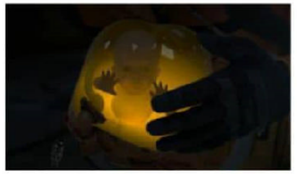
The game that changed the entire landscape of first-person shooters is being rebooted by Infinity Ward and Activision. After numerous sequels set in various times through history, from future warfare right back to World War 2, Infinity Ward decided to go back to basics to refresh the tiring franchise. Returning will be fan favorite Captain Price and the setting will be modern-day once again. The series aims to take a darker tone, placing the player in morally gray situations where one needs to think before one pulls the trigger. It's a brave move for a franchise that has always placed action and controversy over realism. Is it enough to bring the series back to its former glory? It certainly looks promising.



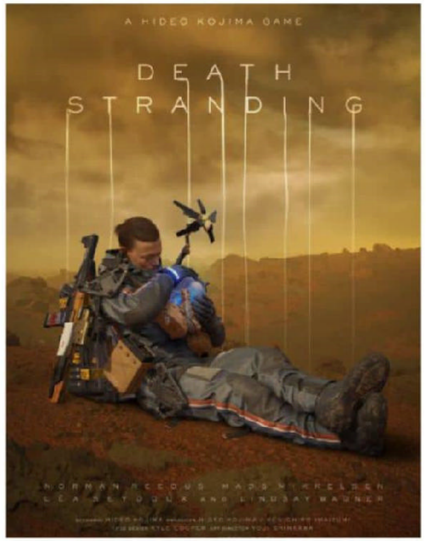












DEATH STRANDING

Japanese auteur Hideo Kojima is seen by many as a genius that creates games we've never seen before, not afraid to push the envelope and happy to swerve everyone with bizarre yet brilliant gameplay choices. Since stepping away from The Metal Gear Solid series, Kojima has been hard at work for Sony with a brand-new IP called Death Stranding. What does anyone know of Death Stranding? Well absolutely nothing. We know it stars Walking Dead badass Norman Reedus, Hannibal star Mads Mikkelsen and cameos from famous film directors Guillermo del Toro and Nicolas Winding Refn. We know the trailers are mind-boggling and weird, featuring disappearing babies, dark shadows that appear out of nowhere and loads of other unexplainable phenomena. The reason why everyone is excited however is the fact that it's Kojima at his best, unchained from the grips of Konami and that can only be a great thing for gamers.









TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: BREAKPOINT

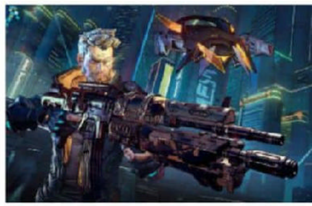
Set as a direct sequel to the previous Wildlands game, you return as the same character along with your team of Ghosts, the ultimate undercover soldiers set on taking down one of your own. Breaking away from the real-life setting of Bolivia, Breakpoint is set on a fictitious South Pacific Auroa Archipelago. The island is home to new bad guys Skell Technology, an enigmatic technology giant that has turned the remote island into a testing site for autonomous drones set on taking over the world. The game feels considerably more variable compared to Wildlands and features brand-new weapons and tactics you'll need to utilize to takedown the enemy. If you enjoyed Wildlands, then Breakpoint is the perfect sequel for fans of tactical warfare.

BORDERLANDS 3

The grandaddy of loot shooters finally returns with the third iteration of the popular Borderlands series. Expect to find the same humor, ridiculous guns and crazy over-the-top enemies that the series is renowned for. A crazed cult known as The Children of the Vault has emerged and is spreading rapidly. Again, you will be able to play solo or co-op with your best friends, with four new Vault Hunters to choose from in this crazy quest to save the galaxy from this new fanatical threat. There are tons of guns and every fight will be an opportunity to add to your arsenal. From exploding sawblades, guns that grow legs and chase your enemies to massive rocket launchers, gun variety will never be a problem.











ROSALEIGH MASON

@RM.OTT

Photography by **MOSAAB ALSARAY @MOSAABALSARAYART**
Agency **EM MODELING AGENCY**
Event **IBMS**





Describe yourself in three words
Funny, kind, and hardworking

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
I was extremely excited to shoot for Playboy! This is a huge opportunity to get not only my name out, but to also receive some much-deserved publicity for EM Modeling Agency and IBMS. These are the companies that believed in me and gave me my start. I would like nothing more than to shower them with the same love, support, and confidence they have provided me.

What was it like starting out as a model?
It was never my intention to model. When I was younger, my mom entered me into a competition that EM Modeling Agency was having without my knowledge. I ended up placing in the top 3. Arlene Roberts, of EM, helped me realize my potential and started working with me to hone my skills.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
My biggest challenge has to be all the networking and social aspects that come along with modeling. Normally, I am a very introverted person and tend to stay to myself. At events, I try to push myself to be more outgoing, though it is a bit difficult to come out of my comfort zone.

Describe your perfect day off when you are not modeling?
The perfect day would either be relaxing in bed while watching Narcos or going to Downtown Asheville with friends to window shop.

Do you feel more like a city person or a country person?
I am most definitely more of a country girl. Growing up in South Georgia I would hunt and fish with my dad. There is nothing better than the slow, laid back atmosphere that the country has to offer - four-wheeler rides in the mud, relaxing floats down a lazy river, bonfires and cookouts with great friends. That's the life I love!

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?
I would love to live near Munich, Germany. As a high school student, my dad got a job that took our whole family to Bayern (Bavaria), Germany. Everything there is beautiful - the mountains, the snow, the rivers. I've moved around a few times and to this day, it's been my favorite place to live.

Do you have a secret talent?
My secret talent is I can roll and fold my tongue in many cool ways that others cannot.

A guilty pleasure?
My guilty pleasure is making Tik-Toks with friends - especially during big events.

Which song is absolutely certain to make you cry whenever you hear it?
Adams Song by Blink-182. This song is about suicide and how committing suicide affects your family and friends. I cry because I went through hard times and it takes me back to bad days.

What's your favorite word in any language and what does it mean?
Hubschrauber (hoob-schrouw-ber) is my favorite word. It is a German word that means "helicopter." While it is somewhat childish, I love the word because it's fun to say!

Any last words you would like to share with the readers?
Do not turn down opportunities! You never know how trying something new may change the direction of your life by igniting a passion you wouldn't have even realized was possible.



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OUR COUNTRY, WHICH ART IN PANIC

WHEN IT COMES TO SEX AND POLICY, NOBODY SEEMS TO KNOW WHICH SIDE WILL BE ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF HISTORY



ILLUSTRATION BY **SOFIE BIRKIN**

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BY **SHIRA TARRANT**

I teach a university class called Gender, Sex and the Law for which I give a series of lectures on Title IX, the 1972 antidiscrimination law that guarantees equal access to education, regardless of sex, at schools that receive federal funding. Lately my lectures have focused more on due process and Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos's recently proposed changes to the law, some of which would bolster the rights of those accused of sexual assault.

DeVos is the point person for policy changes that would modify Obama-era directives on how Title IX violations are handled on college campuses. Since 2017 she has walked back more than 20 directives, including one that addressed patterns of racial disparity in imposing school punishment. Many of DeVos's policies have been criticized by national higher-education groups and pummeled by the media as well as left-leaning students. During one recent lecture I decided to avoid mentioning her by name in an effort to separate political assumptions from policy debate.

Without a doubt, campus sexual misconduct violates the provisions of Title IX. But investigations of such violations are hardly fail-safe. Since 2011, the U.S. government has conducted 502 "investigations of colleges for possibly mishandling reports of sexual violence," according to data from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. My students saw compelling reasons for revising current Title IX procedures. They agreed that changing the burden of proof from what has been dubbed the "50 percent plus a feather" standard to a "clear and convincing" one would better serve justice; anything less than that simply wasn't tough enough, given the gravity of assault charges. They also believed that mandated faculty reporting, which infantilizes students by taking the decision to report an alleged assault out of their hands, should be ended.

My students smartly debated whether a college administrator or our criminal justice system is better suited to adjudicate sexual-assault charges. They questioned the validity of the term *sexual misconduct*, noting that it collapses harassment and rape into one bucket of behavior. They worried about the consequences of ill-equipped employees implementing policies; training tools such as Title IX instructional videos and multiple-choice quizzes, for example, reek of school administrators doing the bare minimum, my students said.

Here's the reveal: Not knowing the architect of the aforementioned Title IX revisions, my left-leaning students, many of them women and people of color, found themselves inadvertently siding with DeVos. Some were stunned to realize they agreed with a person they find morally objectionable. Yet here they were doing just that while having thoughtful discussions based on legal principle rather than party affiliation.

This anecdote is representative of the current state of sexual politics and how, as pointed out by *The New Yorker*'s Masha Gessen in 2017, recent watershed moments have exploded into a full-blown frenzy across sex culture in America. As Gessen astutely summarizes, "Sex panics in the past have begun with actual crimes but led to outsize penalties and, more importantly, to a generalized sense of danger. The object of fear in America's recent sex panics is the sexual predator."

We as a society can agree that the most effective policies are based on reliable data and rational debate. Moral panic on the right and purity politics on the left interfere with our right to sexual safety, pleasure and free expression by encouraging political in-fighting and self- censorship. Both threaten to replace the exchange of facts and civil examination of controversial ideas.

While this tension may seem most prevalent in the public discourse surrounding DeVos's Title IX proposals, there are myriad "watershed moments" in which civil policy-making has been supplanted by partisan uproar and triggered panic. Sex is at the center of every one of these debates. Consider the frequent trivialization of due process in discussions about Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings (even while Christine Blasey Ford's testimony was compelling); the Supreme Court's weighing in on religious bakers who refused to sell wedding cakes to homosexual couples; the controversial passage of FOSTA-SESTA; and the removal of adult content from Tumblr.

Outside politics, we're contending with morality wars over slutand body-shaming; the uncomfortable truth that both consent and harassment are not absolutes; never-ending reports of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church; unsubstantiated claims of homophobia and racism from the Hollywood elite; young people's supposed disinterest in sex (the so-called "millennial sex drought"); and the national rise in STI rates. On any one day, any of these sex-culture stories vie for our attention, and for good reason. But in the face of outrage and the demand for rapid social change, unintended consequences have arisen. Somehow sex, in addition to the sexual predator, has become the enemy. Welcome to the sex panic of this generation.

THE ROOT OF PANIC

The uncompromising outrage of activists and survivors has no doubt drawn important attention to sexual misconduct and egregious criminal behavior. Outrage brings awareness to long- buried issues in desperate need of justice. Outrage has resulted in the #MeToo movement, the formation of Time's Up and the galvanization on display at the annual Women's March. Outrage is a righteous and necessary vanguard in a free society.

Outrage is different from sex panic, however. The former exposes; the latter silences. Panic rejects nuance, debate and disagreement in favor of party lines and swift action. Panic has resulted in the rise of cancel culture and the dismissal of due process. By the time we can consider whether we're in a full-blown cultural panic, rational thinking has already been cast aside. It becomes risky to ask for facts and data. In a sex panic, it becomes imprudent to question the extent to which sex-based discrimination exists. It becomes dangerous to suggest that all sexual violations, and all experiences of sexual violence, are not equivalent. As a consequence, we learn to shut up and sit down lest we face public condemnation and risk being attacked on the internet.

While moral panic around sex lence, sex is nothing new, moral panic is more about social control than ethical guidelines for how we should get along with one another. We have long fretted over how women dress, move, think and speak. Young New York City women of the late 1800s could be arrested for simply going to dance halls because it was seen as a threat to social order. Flappers in the 1920s were deemed amoral for their bobbed haircuts and dancefloor shimmies. Rihanna caused an uproar when she wore a see-through crystal gown to the 2014 CFDA Fashion Awards. Some wondered if she was a suitable role model for today's youth. These are moral panics.



The list goes on, but morality is not the driving cause of today's divide. At least not on its own. You need to exacerbate moral panic with public backlash, political motivations and the influence of technology. This, I would argue, is the anatomy of today's sex panic.

This perfect storm has also created a culture in which we desire nothing more than for our friends and neighbors to agree with our interpretation of a "moral, just society." No one definition, however, can be truly inclusive, informed or progressive. Instead, well-intended attempts to regulate morality only heighten panic by promoting, for example, sex-trafficking laws that ignore racist immigration policies and degrade sex workers as second-class citizens, or online-pornography regulations that impinge on free speech and artistic expression.

We don't need to look outside our borders for evidence that today's sex panic has been bubbling up for years. The state of Utah passed a resolution and the Republican Party issued a proclamation in 2016 stating that pornography is a public health issue, despite the lack of reliable evidence proving it is. Since 2017 the left has rushed to shame anyone accused of any offense, from Senator Al Franken to comedian Aziz Ansari. Crucial conversations, including lessons on consent in public-school sex education, are buried under louder tweet storms about toxic masculinity and the power of the patriarchy. Awkward sexual encounters continue to be conflated with the worst of accusations. And then: If he's accused, he must have done it.

That particular assumption was evident at Pomona College's annual Great Debate event in the spring of 2018. The liberal arts college, situated outside Los Angeles, provided a forum for discussion about campus sexual assault. The panelists included author Roxane Gay, Northwestern University film studies professor Laura Kipnis and attorney Brett Sokolow, president of the Association of Title IX Administrators and CEO of TNG, a risk management consulting and law firm.

The crowd of undergraduates booed Kipnis—who'd been the subject of two Title IX investigations after authoring a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article critical of current procedure and defending a Northwestern colleague who'd been disciplined for sexual harassment for suggesting (if a bit dispassionately) that due process was important in campus adjudication of sexual misconduct. Gay, a hero among millennials and feminists, received applause following her claim that wealthy and famous men accused of #MeToo violations would "be just fine" in the long run.

That line of thinking concerns Lara Bazelon, director of the Racial Justice Clinic at the University of San Francisco School of Law. "No matter the evidence, supporters of victims' rights are willing to suspend procedural justice or the rule of law to expel the accused," she says, even though "due process is the bedrock of our system."

Bazelon's perspective is informed by her years of work representing poor people and those who are statistically likelier to be oppressed by the judicial system. Such oppression disproportionately maps onto communities of color. Black male students are more severely impacted by Title IX, Bazelon says, much as black men are overrepresented in the prison system. Gay was talking specifically about privileged men, but assuming accused sexual violators will "be just fine" in the absence of due process glosses over systemic racism on campuses and in courtrooms across the country. This pattern extends beyond the formal criminal justice system to the internet and its nurturing of cancel culture.

Controversially, the NAACP's St. Louis County branch has come out in support of Missouri state legislation that would implement DeVosian revisions. "The denial of due process at Missouri's colleges disproportionately impacts African American men and that's why we call for immediate due process reforms," John Gaskin III, the chapter's president, said in a press release. The NAACP's national office and the Missouri state branch both oppose DeVos's proposed changes to Title IX protections, however, commenting that while Missouri needs to protect civil rights, rewriting Title IX is not the pathway.

"Misogyny shapes a culture in which survivors aren't believed. Anti-blackness shapes a culture in which some individuals may feel 'uncomfortable' around black people and project that as 'unsafe.' Both these statements are true," says Twanna A. Hines, an award-winning sex educator. Thus, our current sex panic has no doubt resulted in missed opportunities to investigate Title IX's racist implications or reeducate people on the importance —and constitutional guarantee — of due process in our democracy.

As galling as it is to find oneself in agreement with DeVos, this does not make one a Trumpist shill. The current political climate means "you're either on team accused or team accuser," says Bazelon. "Due process gets pushed aside, because in this scenario, once you're on your team, it doesn't matter what the facts are. The left offers full-throated support for the rights of the accused in criminal cases — until it comes to sex offenses. The assumption is that if someone is accused of sexual misconduct, they must be guilty."

THE COST OF DISAGREEMENT

In late 2018, Bazelon penned a *New York Times* op-ed piece titled "I'm a Democrat and a Feminist. And I Support Betsy DeVos's Title IX Reforms." After suggesting that due process is integral to antiracism, Bazelon received threatening calls saying that she was a moron, that she hates women and that she should die or be fired. She was publicly attacked on Twitter too, at times by people who privately told her they agreed with the fundamental importance of due process. The Twitter attacks largely came from liberals.

Before publishing her op-ed, Bazelon had braced herself for backlash. But she could never have predicted the accusations of racism — particularly confounding given that her life's work has focused on racial justice. If you're concerned about sexual violence and also care about justice, due process and people of color, where are you going to stand? It's a question for which Bazelon has no answer.

More mainstream figures have been similarly excoriated for arguing that unwanted touching, rape and pedophilia are qualitatively distinct. One such figure is actor Matt Damon, who suggested as much in the days after *The New Yorker* published its first exposé on the alleged sex crimes of Harvey Weinstein. Without question, all the aforementioned acts must be confronted and eradicated, Damon insisted. "Every woman who comes forward with one of these stories deserves to be listened to and heard," he said.

But that part of his commentary was shoved aside. After suggesting there may be a "spectrum" of bad behavior — that inappropriate behavior is not the same as criminal behavior Damon apologized on live television.

Damon and others who may share his views have good reason to suggest we need to distinguish between behaviors that fall on a continuum from "bad sexual manners" to "sexual assault." Yes, this continuum exists within a patriarchal matrix of domination. But when we conflate sincerely apologetic men who may have behaved crudely, such as Senator Franken, with truly criminal men, such as alleged repeat offender R. Kelly, "the clear signal to men and young people is: Deny it. Because if you take responsibility for what you did, your life's going to get ruined. But if you deny it, you can be in the White House — you can be president." Damon said this in an ABC News interview.

THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH

When it comes to sexual-misconduct cases on campus, "a lot of times both students are credible," says Patricia Hamill, a Philadelphia-based attorney who has represented more than 100 students accused of Title IX violations. She explains how crucial misunderstandings can have unequivocally serious impact: "She says, 'Do you have a condom?' He hears, 'That was a yes.' But she could mean 'I'm trying to slow you down.' Or 'I'm not sure.' " Or perhaps she's trying to create a pivot so she can figure out what to do.

Because alcohol or drugs often accompany sexual situations on American campuses, this creates complicated situations for adjudication. In our current climate, asking if the people involved were drunk can be viewed as blaming the victim. But equating proper investigation techniques with victim-blaming ignores the truth that alcohol consumption is often a factor in how details are recollected, Hamill says. "In murky situations, both parties very much believe their perception of what happened," she explains.

People often have an implicit bias toward one version of a story. Bazelon and Hamill share a concern that many Title IX administrators assume all complaints of sexual misconduct have standing. ("If there was a complaint, something must've happened.") In reality, a complaint should only signal the point at which fair procedures begin to be implemented — for all parties involved.

Another complication is when a survivor continues to contact an alleged assaulter. In one highly publicized case, Columbia University student Emma Sulkowicz accused fellow student Paul Nungesser of having raped her in 2012. Two years later, after he was cleared of responsibility by a university disciplinary panel, she turned her experience into performance art, which gained national attention from *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post,* among other outlets. In the days immediately following her alleged attack, Sulkowicz had messaged Nungesser numerous times, her tone ranging from polite to friendly.

"When asked why they texted the next day as if nothing was wrong," Hamill explains, "some say, 'I don't know why I texted that. I was trying to understand what happened. It took a bit of time to realize I was raped.' " It's important to have a traumainformed framework that's sensitive to such inter- and intrapersonal responses that may seem odd to outsiders. "But that can't be the starting place for adjudication," Hamill argues. As a judge stated in the 2016 *Doe v. Brandeis* ruling, which involved two male students who'd been romantically involved, "Whether someone is a victim is a conclusion to be reached at the end of a fair process, not an assumption to be made at the beginning."

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"DUE PROCESS GETS PUSHED ASIDE. THE LEFT OFFERS FULL THROATED SUPPORT FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE ACCUSED IN CRIMINAL CASES— UNTIL IT COMES TO SEX OFFENSES."

In line with that thinking, Sokolow tells me about a call he once received from administrators after a gay male student attempted to bring Title IX charges against the school. The student was aggrieved by the fact that Chick-fil-A had catered an on-campus training program. Chick-fil-A's president opposes marriage equality and the company has been accused of homophobia.

Students are free to push administrations to make better choices. "But you can't say that eating Chick-fil-A is sex-based discrimination," Sokolow says. A decade ago, "this claim would have simply been sent away with the clear understanding that the student was not discriminated against."

Sokolow describes a groupthink impulse wherein "minor affronts lead to vigilante efforts to terminate faculty. We must separate inappropriate actions from egregious violations so we can best address both."

Should low barriers of proof and unchecked claims of violation continue to be publicly classified as legitimate, one fear, Sokolow says, is that we could find ourselves in situations where "men on campus don't want to mentor female faculty. Hugs are absolutely prohibited in the campus workplace. And while there is good reason for concern about lecherous colleagues who cop a feel or physically abuse their positions of power under the pretense of an affectionate hug, this prohibition cuts two ways. A workplace so sterile you can't express affection for your co-workers is not a place people want to work."

In California, a state court recently ruled that students accused of sexual misconduct have the right to a hearing and to cross-examine their accusers. As a result, colleges across the state prepared to overhaul their procedures for addressing Title IX complaints, including halting the single-investigator model, in which campus investigators serve as both sleuth and judge.

But what else can be done? For one, a prioritization of education is necessary. This means reeducating both students and the public about due process and the judicial system — important foundations of U.S. democracy. It also means discussing with young people the nuances of consent and the realities of sexual desire. Some argue that a generational shift in understanding is already under way and that the "millennial sex drought" is temporary but a sign of change. Hamill, the mother of two sons and a college-age daughter, says, "I'm encouraged that younger people are getting better at talking about what they want sexually. People are being up front about their desires."

We must also shift the cultural mandate from "believe all women" to "listen to women." Relatedly, "listening well" is the appropriate response to trauma. "Believe women" when you're a friend or a therapist. But what's crucial in an interpersonal context is not necessarily advisable in a legal setting. When it comes to cross-examination, Hamill explains, "you should be sensitively asking questions with respect and dignity." That doesn't mean avoiding cross-examination altogether.

For adjudication to be just and fair, we need both due process and more information about trauma. This doesn't mean coddling, which alarms the political right, but understanding that victims may be extremely sensitive or seem dispassionate, and in addition to the fight-or-flight response, traumatized people can also have spotty memories or become emotionally or mentally catatonic. None of these displays prove or disprove a case. While campuses and victim-support services are incorporating this trauma-based understanding, it's important to note that this approach is based on controversial research. We must be willing to hit PAUSE; we can't be afraid to admit we just don't know yet.

This doesn't mean all truth is relative. It means we as a society need to be measured in our assessments. It also means shifting our attention. According to Justin R. Garcia of the Kinsey Institute, "For policy-makers who aren't thinking about sex and gender every day as researchers do, legislating these concerns can easily become panics."

In a culture that fails to prevent rape, harassment and assault, no one is unscathed. It's time to turn our focus from survivors and victims to the perpetrators and bystanders. We must all work to revive an ethics of care and put our relations with others at the center of moral action. Otherwise our sense of truth, justice and morality will continue to become mired in a widespread, unchecked cultural panic — and sex will remain the enemy. ■

HEATHER *Kirby*

Photography by **LUIS GOMEZ @UNIVERSE137STUDIOS**
Model **@HEATHERCURVYKIRBY**





Tell us something surprising about you?
I'm spontaneous and I'm a country girl at heart.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Yes! I have always admired Playboy and have always wanted to be apart of it.

What inspires you?
Strong beautiful independent women.

Why did you choose to pursue a career in modelling?
Because I have always admired models and the beauty and travel that goes with it and have always wanted to be published in magazines.

Who do you look up to in the modelling industry?
First was Cindy Crawford and I also love Adriana Lima.

What are some of your hobbies?
Free diving, Spearfishing, Traveling, Volleyball.

Name three things on your bucket list?
Europe trip, Hang gliding, Cave diving.

Turn-ons
Smelling good, nice smile, great personality, funny, massages.

Turn-offs
Body odour, cockiness, no sense of humor.

Describe to us your perfect date:
Something out of the ordinary like sky diving, or go karts or racing exotic cars.

Which world capital would you most like to visit, and why?
Athens, Greece because it is one of the worlds oldest cities and there is so much history there I think it would be a romantic place to visit.

What is your mantra?
Be with those who bring out the best in you, not the stress in you.

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YOU GOTTA SLEEPOVER!

That's cool. Here are the hotels we'd recommend you visit during your weekend get-away.

Hooters Casino Hotel 115 East Tropicana Ave. It's been recently renovated, blackjack starts at $1, entertainment if affordable and the views of the Strip are fantastic. Talk about value for money. hooterscasinohotel.com

The LINQ 3535 South Las Vegas Blvd With 2,640 rooms the well-known LINQ's trendy setting has more than enough space and ample facilities on offer ensuring you enjoy the best of Las Vegas. caesars.com linq

The Golden Nugget 129 East Fremont St. This classic downtown resort dating from 1946 is the most luxurious resort on Fremont Street and it's well-known or exceeding customer expectations with its many great experiences on offer. goldennugget.com las-vegas

The Mirage 3400 South Las Vegas Blvd. Much more than extraordinary, the Mirage overlooks the iconic erupting volcano, has a dolphin habitat, an array of entertainment areas and a butler service making it a true oasis. mirage.mgmresorts.com

Staybridge Suites 5735 Dean Martin Dr. A cosmopolitan luxury-style boutique hotel with plenty of amenities and a free breakfast buffet. Although it's non-gambling it's inviting ambiance is perfect if you're looking for an extended stay. ihg.com/staybridge.

DINE TIME!

Wanna grab a bite to eat or experience some fine dining? No problem, here are some must-see places to get some really tasty food!

Mr. Mamas 5693 South Jones Blvd. They serve the best breakfast in Las Vegas, hot and fast! mrmamaslv.com

Steak n Shake 115 East Tropicana Ave. If it's meat you're after their famous for their steak burgers. steaknshake.com

Chin Chin 3790 South Las Vegas Blvd. Have a craving for Asian? You've just got to try their dim sum. chinchin.com

VegeNation 616 East Carson Ave. It's hard to believe their tasty chicken burgers are 100% plant based. vegenationlv.com

Weera Thai 3839 West Sahara Ave. The best Thai food in town, plus they deliver! weerathai.com

HIT THE TOWN!

The nightlife in Vegas is legendary, so why not join the party scene by visiting these trendy nightspots we're sure you'll love!

Marquee Nightclub 3708 South Las Vegas Blvd. The Marquee is an award-winning nightclub that spans 60,000 square-feet and features a 40-foot LED DJ booth and projection stage which is a favorite among clubgoers and nightlife aficionados. marqueelasvegas.com

JEWEL Nightclub 3730 South Las Vegas Blvd. JEWEL is a trendy 24,000 square-foot nightspot that hosts a variety of well-known DJs and talented performers in a LED-lit setting that creates the perfect "it's party time" ambiance. jewelnightclub.com

Hakkasan Nightclub 3799 South Las Vegas Blvd. It's expensive but the DJs and atmosphere at Hakkasan is first-class. Here you'll experience a premium Asian fusion nightclub and lounge that's truly on another level. hakkasannightclub.com

Encore Beach Club at Night 3131 South Las Vegas Blvd. At EBC they offer an expansive pool facility with cabanas and top dance DJs playing awesome tracks on the decks all night long, proving that pool parties can be just as much fun when the sun goes down. surrendernightclub.com

OMNIA 3570 South Las Vegas Blvd. Located inside Caesars Palace, OMNIA is a one-stop venue that has it all with a premium lounge that's home to a tri-level club that plays mixes from top DJs with an amazing view of the Strip. omniaclubs.com

FUN IN THE SUN!

Aside from some of the best clubs in the country Las Vegas also has some fabulous pool party venues where the drinks are plenty and the women are gorgeous. It's a must if you really want the full Vegas experience!

Wet Republic MGM Grand. Spend a day having some fun in the sun as the who's who of renowned artists and DJs take over Wet Republic every Saturday and Sunday. wetrepublic.com

Sapphire Topless Pool and Dayclub 3025 Sammy Davis Jr Dr. Book a daybed and catch a tan or gather your bros and party hard all day long to the tunes of resident DJs and the views of beautiful (and topless) women. sapphirepoollv.com

LIQUID Pool Lounge 3730 S Las Vegas Blvd. Feel like a celeb and relax in style at this premium upmarket venue that offers a distinctive ambiance complemented by great music mixes and ultra-VIP service. liquidpoollv.com

Cove Beach Caesars Palace. This fantastic pool venue with a Mediterranean vibe and contemporary personality combines art, music, energy and high-end inclusivity to create an unforgettable poolside experience. caesars.com

GO Pool Dayclub 3555 South Las Vegas Blvd. Take it easy at this lively poolside day club located at the Flamingo Hotel and Casino that features cabana rentals and plays all the hits from various styles and genres of music. gopoolvegas.com

WATCH A LIVE SHOW!

Las Vegas is known to have some of the best live entertainment in the world. Some of the shows in Vegas can be as unique as they are entertaining and here's what we'd suggest you go see.

Blue Man Group Luxor Hotel and Casino. A truly unique family-friendly show that'll keep you captivated for hours with a mixture of visually stunning and innovative technology combined with music and color. Tickets available at blueman.com

Paranormal The Mindreading Magic Show Bally's Las Vegas. Watch in amazement as International mentalist Frederic Da Silva showcases the powers of his mind in a performance that's filled with hypnosis, mind-reading, mystery and magic. Tickets available at caesars.com/ballys-las-vegas

Penn and Teller Rio Suite Hotel and Casino. Experience a live performance that's a hilarious combination of comedy and intrigue as Penn and Teller blend outrageous humor and use all sorts of props to push the boundaries of traditional magic. Tickets available at caesars.com/rio-las-vegas

The Beatles LOVE by Cirque du Soleil Mirage Hotel and Casino. Celebrate the legacy of The Beatles with a musical catalog that features special effects, freestyle dancing and aerial acrobatics that'll have you reliving some of the best Beatles moments. Tickets available at cirquedusoleil.com

Mystère by Cirque du Soleil Treasure Island Hotel and Casino. A show that's particularly fun for young children and teens this must-see performance makes use of incredible visuals complete with singing, dancing, and stunning acrobatics. Tickets available at cirquedusoleil.com

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FOR THE DAY WALKERS!

There is tons of stuff to do, it's not all about parties and living it up. There's also a more adventurous site to the state of Nevada. Here are some awesome one-of-a-kind experiences that are sure to be memorable.

Nostalgia Street Rods 5375 Cameron St. Love hot rods? Get access to a private collection of classic street rods and scooters from 1910 to 1965. There's also a large selection of sports and music memorabilia and antiques. nostalgiastreetrods.com

Lion Habitat Ranch 382 Bruner Ave, Henderson. Want to see the "other" wild side? Then check out this sanctuary which is home to several lions and a giraffe with optional guided tours and feeding experiences on offer. lionhabitatranch.org

GC Flight Helicopter Tour 4081 Dean Martin Dr. Get a bird's eye view of the splendor of the Grand Canyon and Las Vegas Strip with one of the most economical helicopter tours available. gcflight.com

The Mob Museum 300 Stewart Ave. Ever heard of "the Mob connection?" Here, you can explore real Mob stories through interactive exhibits as the museum offers a bold and authentic view of organized crime from vintage Las Vegas. themobmuseum.org

Ultimate Hoover Dam Tour Pick up and drop off from selected hotels. An awesome all-inclusive tour with a guide teaching you the history and mechanics of the dam with the highlight being a 'Walk on the Top' where you get to trek over the top of the dam itself. viator.com/las-vegas



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